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THE WINDS OF THE WORLD

"The fierceness of the North Wind
& the bitterness of the East;
the honeyed breath of the South,
the passion of the West - in truth
all the winds of the world play upon
the tree of love"

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& the bitterness of the East;
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all the winds of the world play upon
the tree of love"

o

THE WINDS OF THE WORLD

Seven Love Stories

by

Millicent Sutherland

WITH A FRONTISPIECE
BY WALTER CRANE

LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN
1902

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THE FATE THAT FOLLOWS

"Gold or silver every day
Dies to grey." . . .

THE FATE THAT FOLLOWS

N the air of a November night — wet, and warm as early June — disconnected sounds were borne hither and thither, gaining importance from the repose of the atmosphere. A fish-hawker cried his wares; a chain clanked at the pier-head; under lately moored fishing smacks the water sucked and gurgled; aboard one of these a belated worker, hampered in the achievement of his task, uttered impatient oaths. No moon nor star pierced the blackness, but here and there in uncurtained windows a lamp burned feebly, set by an inmate who, without thought of the community at large, needed for a time an illumination.

Within the doors of the *Milk and Mustard*, standing beside the quay, the life of the port of Marke was more truly expressed. Here unusual jollity prevailed. A fishing fleet from Scotland, following herring, had anchored for a night in the outer harbour. The masters, making all fast, and inquisitive as to the ways and man-

ners of the inhabitants, had landed in company to explore; but the evening was unpropitious, the tavern inviting; it set a limit to their ambitions.

The hostility of south-coast fishermen to intruders on their grounds was converted by curiosity into hospitality. Every bench and settle in the *Milk and Mustard* became crowded; the proprietor began a roaring trade.

Below the public-house and its five worn stone steps ran at right angles, and almost to the edge of the sea, a row of dwellings; on stormy nights the waves would scatter their spray upon the uneven thresholds. Old these houses were and lean-to; insanitary, yet fully inhabited. In respect of the tenants, the town of Marke could account for little. They were nearly all aliens, striving, it was hinted, in one way or another to atone by a dismal present for a tumultuous past. The "Settlers' Barracks," the familiar name for the row, held possibly its comedies and its tragedies, but they were out of line with the gossips of the town; little could be gathered concerning them in the market-place. A hearse,

or the cart from the general provision store, called as necessity required at one or other of the warped green doors, otherwise the dwellers, man, woman, and child, lived pretty much as they pleased.

To-night the majority of these, being, in spite of their mystery, of no uncommon clay, gazed on the crowded harbour, and, catching the spirit of excitement, had saved the price of oil and tallow-dip, to join the throng in the tavern and gain, so they considered, a fairer exchange for their pence. Beneath one door only a faint line of light broke the depressing gloom, and the murmur of voices, or an occasional hollow cough, spoke of life within.

A girl and two men were in the kitchen, which served also as parlour. The girl sat sewing on a straight-backed sofa which filled one side of the wall. This sofa, with its carved ornaments and faded damask cushions, looked quaintly out of place, but gave an immediate interest to the room. The fire was well stacked; the light from the coals, from the flame of a single candle in a heavy brass candlestick on the dresser, and from

a lamp on a shelf, mingled and flickered around the girl. Her needle passed unceasingly through the soft, grey material that lay upon her lap, and thence hung entwined about her feet and trailed on the clean brick floor.

A young man sat beside her, and his arm touched her shoulder. He wore still the jersey of the day's employment, and his well-shaped sunburnt hands were clenched between his knees; a faint, briny odour clung to his clothes; to his curly auburn head. From his pipe, held bowl downwards, the ashes trickled unnoticed upon the grey stuff. He wore no collar round his muscular throat. The rough edges of his jersey bound his neck, and with ostentatious jauntiness a large horn-handled knife was stuck through a leather waist-belt like a feather in a cap.

"Love," he was saying, and his voice, full and refined in accent, quivered as he spoke, "only twenty-four hours and you're mine. I'll hold you close, I'll call you wife — you're not afraid?"

She looked into his face and drew her breath quicker, for his passion, strong, and so

strange to these cramped surroundings, enveloped her.

"Do you want me so much?" she said simply, and tossed back her head, displaying thus the beauty of her features, the delicate moulding of chin and ear, — "are you sure?"

"Sure?" He sought his words slowly to gain mastery over a burning impulse. "I 'm counting every moment, as I 've counted every hour. Have n't I suffered enough to gain you? I dread everything till we're together. Margot" — his voice took on a fiercer tone —"if any one wanted you, if any one took you from me now, I should kill him."

"No one wants to keep me, wild boy, no one but —" She had risen to her feet, and whispering, nodded towards the bowed figure in the chair on the hearth.

She took the few steps which separated her from the man whom she had indicated, and knelt beside him. He seemed as he sat, of great height, his head belied the droop of his shoulders. It was alert and defiant in pose; he looked like a man waiting for a word — ready on its delivery

for immediate action; only the closest glance revealed the fact that he was blind — stone blind.

"Father," she said, pressing to him.

He made no reply, but stretched out his right hand before him, searching.

The girl took it and clasped it in hers.

"To-morrow I 'm to be married," she went on eagerly, "at the chapel, you know. The flowers are there already. The minister said no flowers — that neither dead nor living needed them gathered — but I filled my arms from the Squire's vinery, and brought them and piled them in wet moss under the altar because to-morrow they must be fresh. Dick calls them 'white star-fish' and the autumn leaves 'blood traces on his boat decks,' but they 'll be the best of all the wedding — they and your blessing."

She looked over her shoulder but met with no expostulation to reprove such bold words. Dick's head was bowed upon his hands. The man at her side moved restlessly; his feet shuffled on the rag-mat laid beneath them.

"I 'm so happy," she said, continuing her thoughts.

Then John Winterscale spoke sharply; he tried to escape her hold.

"Is that her voice? Listen — answer — is that her voice?"

"My voice, father, mine — mine," she urged. "Come back to the present for my sake. I 'm so tired of the past."

He gave a cracked laugh.

"Tired — you 've said that often, Therese — tired! When you dance all night and sing all day, and I 've been waiting so long. It 's I who should be tired — I."

His querulousness sank to a moaning and a muttering. He gave sharp jerks to his shoulders and elbows, as if he wished to rise and hold something that was eluding him.

In desperation, Margot was driven to explain. She must make this man realise her life that was to be, as he realised his own that had slipped behind him. To-night, in view of the inevitable to-morrow, seemed her last chance.

Dick called imperatively from the sofa. "Let him alone, he won't understand. Come back to me — I miss you."

She smiled confidently. "Wait — not all things at once. He must understand — it will be all the world if he understands — wait."

She still clung to the worn hands; upon each she laid a kiss and they became passive to her touch. To give coherence to his thoughts, there was but one charm to work, worn thin as it was with cruel use.

"Tell me about my mother," she asked, with quick decision.

There passed through the gaunt frame a visible thrill; an expression of hope crossed the man's face. The blank of his sightless eyes was forgotten.

"Little Margot, is it?" His voice changed. "Little Margot's good-night? Whist! Say your prayers, and I 'll tell you about her I love best. She is out now," he crooned, "when you sleep she 'll be home — sure, certain she 'll be home, and she 'll sleep too, while all my soul enfolds her."

He paused, racked by his cough. To the girl there was nothing strange in the situation. The romance of her lonely youth had been built

around that phrase "Tell me about my mother;" all the romance of her memories and all the misery. She would be the little child again to the father who only knew her as such. She would open the windows of his darkened mind and bring him, through the lisping of her simple prayer, a fuller knowledge to-night. The Margot of to-day in momentary disguise of yesterday would become a reality to him at last. Dick had said it was impossible, but she would try, and he should see. He was watching her now, half fearful of her kisses given to this strange blind man, half jealous of them. She felt his glowing eyes upon her though she did not turn her head.

Far out, from the harbour bar, came the sound of moving waters. Dick heard it, his listening strained, concentrated, like that of all seafaring men.

"The wind's rising from the south-east," he said.

But Margot prayed: "Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name," — like a young child she faltered and intoned, her eyes

the while fixed on the sightless face and on the moving lips, till the prayer faded into silence, and he cried out: "They say I 'm blind, but I see — I see!"

As he gathered strength to speak on, he grew exultant: "She is dressed in silver, she is dressed in gold. I 've read of beauty, I 've dreamt of it, but she: She is more beautiful than all, and she dances to the whole world."

"Yes, yes," repeated Margot breathlessly, urging him, "she dances — she dances — tell me more?"

"They said I should never win her — I, a mad Oxford boy with all my laurels to gain. In the great theatre where princes crowded to her with their wild applause, how should she notice me who crawled to kiss her feet, I, who crouched in the dark and waited for what was so certainly mine. One day her smiling eyes reached me and she saw — do you hear — saw me."

"I hear," the girl answered tremulously.

"Through six countries I followed her — in each one I found her more desirable. She drove me from her with tears and anger, she threw my

gifts to the street boys, but to all places and crowds I followed and I fought for her, — she could not escape, — how could she? Then one day — one day she came to me; crept slowly because she was tired, she said; ran fast because my love compelled her, and when I had her safe to toil for, and little Margot came" — he turned on his chair with a convulsive movement — "I lost her. I lost her," he almost shrieked, "and I cannot see to find her."

How often Margot had heard this story. How indelibly every detail of his fancy, and the truth of the sordid reality had been imprinted on her mind. She raised her eyes to the faded photograph of the ballet dancer hung above the mantelpiece. She saw the exquisite features and mocking eyes of the mother whom she remembered only as in a dream, the woman who had fallen from superb triumph to ghastly degradation, maiming out of all shape the soul of this man whom she had swayed so absolutely. To-night in the telling of his story he was more flushed, more impatient than Margot had ever seen him; as he talked he snatched his hands

from hers and beat them together. He rose and fell in his chair as if he rode in a chase. He was rapidly out-reaching his strength. She leant the more heavily against his knee, confused by her effort, conscious of a supreme difficulty before her.

"Listen," she insisted.

He caught up the word intelligently: "Listen, while you tell me she was unworthy — that she's dead — that her name is degraded! I tell you she lives — she loves me — she comes, she —" by an effort of will, as if something had been spoken in his ear, he checked himself; his head sank upon his breast, his poor arms shook as if with palsy.

"Dear, hush," soothed the girl, the tears running down her cheeks. "It was not for evil I asked you to listen, father. I am Margot, your little Margot. Didn't you hear me pray? Say once that you love *me*, that you bless me, for to-morrow I shall marry Dick Harrod."

The name with a flicker of fresh reason came forcibly through his lips: "Harrod — would you have me bless the traitor who steals her heart? That deceiver of women! Ah, she will not

listen. Therese — a curse upon her — she loves him — she loves him!" He slurred into a whimpering jargon, and sank, a maudlin heap, lower in his chair; his hands, limp and nerveless, fell heavily like pendants to his twitching arms. The moment was past.

Margot staggered to her feet. Her lover supported her, but she suffered the faintness of despair. Helplessly her glance wandered to the corners of the room; it rambled from the pieces of furniture that from here and there in the old manor-house of other days had been saved from the auctioneer, to the tumbled lines of her wedding gown, to her lover's face.

He caught her look and by his expression of entreaty changed it. She gave a deep sigh as if awakening from a trance and trembled in his hold.

"Sweetheart," he cried, leaning her back against his breast, "what did I tell you? He can't understand — he'll never understand again. His mind's distraught."

"Harrod — Harrod —" she murmured in dull distress. "What did he mean, Dick?"

"He meant that my father was a gentleman, as the phrase goes — Harrod of the Tor — and that you knew already: that he wronged my mother for one and cast sheep's eyes at yours years after is truth. Ah — bad knowledge for your sweet ears. My mother, bless her, softened my father's fierce temper in me, but it rages still when they try to hurt you, when they try —" he broke off — his eyes scanned her face hungrily. "Ah, my God! How I love you!" he cried out and covered her mouth with kisses.

She wrenched herself free and stepped back, her face suffused. "Don't, don't — that's not what I want. You're all alike, you men — passion — passion. Our purity to feed it; we must be angels that you may be devils. You frighten me, I say — you frighten me as much as father does." Then she threw herself upon his breast again, and called out for forgiveness; imploring him to love the white flowers on the altar, the softness of her wedding dress, the Bible she had given him as a wedding gift, as much as he loved her, till, over-

wrought, she fell a-laughing at the wonder in his eyes.

Presently as they sat together at peace again, the ever-falling rain began to patter and trickle noisily in great drops upon the pavement and upon the roof. The deep whistle of an approaching steamer sounded. The moaning at the harbour bar had grown very distinct, and angry gusts of wind heralded a midnight tempest. John Winterscale, huddled in his chair, seemed fast asleep.

With her thimbled finger Margot pointed to him.

"Shall he be with us, Dick?"

"Aye — if it is the fate that follows — Heaven grant no worse. You can watch with him when I 'm at sea, and have his company."

She pouted.

"Must you go often fishing, Dick, and leave me lonely. What if she came back?"

"She? — she 's gone — don't fret for that, dear love. What should bring her here again — no money or diamonds, I warrant." He touched the weather-glass beside him. "A bad fall," he

added; "I mistrust these sullen evenings — there 'll be shipwreck before morning. I shall go and tend the moorings of the boats. We want no further losses."

Margot checked him.

"Wait — one moment longer — wait. They 're coming from the tavern, let the crowd go by. Do you hear them? They 'll get brawling if they can and throw foolish words at you."

Dick smiled. "Are you afraid for me?"

"Yes," said Margot. "I 'm afraid for your wild temper."

In truth the rabble in the street seemed large and noisy. Well satisfied, and unwilling to hide longer behind shut doors, they shouted, yelled and cursed. Heavy footsteps shuffled and danced, oaths slipped up in vacant laughter. Loud beyond all else sounded a woman's angry chatter, then a woman's scream.

Margot heard it.

"The creature 's hurt" — she bit her lip — "I 'm sure she 's hurt. Now how still it is! Are they running for help? Listen." She lifted her hand.

"You can't bind her wounds, dear soul," and Dick, rising, kissed her on the fingers.

But almost instantly he was thrust from his footing to unsteadiness. The door had been determinedly and violently pushed inwards, and a woman, flinging herself through the entrance against his shoulder and falling back, let her weight hasten the slamming of the door behind her. She looked with a sleepy smile upon the consternation she had aroused.

"They're after me," she muttered; "a fuss for nothing. I caught her in the ribs with the castanets and knocked the wind out of her. I'm all right here, ain't I?" She walked forward a pace or two, and dropped into the carved high chair by the window to scan with insolent familiarity one and the other with a gaze first of scrutiny, then of interest, then of sheer amazement.

"Well, life's queer enough, but this is queerest of all," she chuckled as their silence continued. "I've come back, old man," she repeated, raising her voice, "I've come back; hurry now and take me to your arms."

At the sound of the voice John Winterscale turned his head with a rapid horizontal movement, but he made no sign of speech. "What are you waiting for?" she added. "You deserve a warm time for this cold welcome."

"Hush," cried Margot impulsively, "don't you know he's blind?"

"Blind, is he? That he always was — to the world's ways," the woman retorted, and lifting her heavy eyelids she fixed inquisitive eyes upon the lovers. She was not very drunk, but the brandy of an evening's carousal had swept away all reserve. Her curiosity was indefinably coarse.

"Who said 'no luck'? Back to the bosom of my family, with a girl as like myself as two peas, and a young pirate of a lover for her very own. Kiss her, Dick Harrod. Do you think I don't know you? You've your father's eyes, young sir, and he made a fine wooer." She swept her eyes jealously over Margot's face: "Stitch through your wedding dress, but no mating if I have my way; you'd have the world at your feet to-morrow, and not a sailor man's cabin as the

beginning and the end. Ah," she pursued with a laugh, "I hear them running on. They've missed their quarry this time and left me with my new fortune."

Margot, in this woman's revelation, saw no illusion, but the truth. She surveyed the fate that foils all mortal strategies to capture joy, and shuddered at its aspect. This wreck, this defaced image, upon which strong passions had burnt and smouldered, and by which Love, with hidden face, had flown past — this destroyer — this shameless woman — her mother — her mother! And Dick must know it now. The agony of that. This mother's blood in her veins, this nature grafted to hers, — what could her soul, tainted so hideously, sanctify; what could it save or uplift? Not Dick and his mad passion! Heavens, not Dick, light of her eyes! Like a waxing flame the idea burnt in her brain. She stood now, the work dropped from her hands, her bosom heaving, and listened to the torrent of words; and with every nerve and muscle tense, her lover waited beside her in stony silence.

"Come," said the woman, rising unsteadily, "shall I tell you what I was before the years stole their d——d march on me? Shall I tell you how I danced to the piping, and made men laugh, and sob, and shout?" She broke into a slovenly quick-step, lifting her draggled brown skirts from the muddy, misshapen boots that covered her still supple feet. "Old man," she bantered, her head on one side, her arms akimbo, "do you hear?"

With the movement the tinselled hat fell away from her face, and the old insolent witchery flashed for an instant over her faded countenance, so deformed in outline and texture that the actually delicate features had lost all distinction. "Old man, you 're blind," she went on, "but do you remember the hall at Garseppo and your prayers? You 've chosen a bleak dwelling since I left you, but get back the piano from the pawnshop, and I 'll drown your shrieking winds — I hate 'em," and she laughed noisily.

Winterscale in his chair had begun to whimper like a teased child: "Ghosts, ghosts, they are mumming and mocking me, Therese, stealing

your voice and your memories. Ah!" — with a sudden sharp snarl of impotence — "would that I could kill them!"

"Ghosts," again the shrill ugly laugh — "little ghost about me, poor fool as ever. Oh! you 've sold my piano and my dancing shoes. For shame, you pauper prince. Does that old name grate on your ears? Bah! I can do you no more hurt nor good — but *she* can — *she* can —" and the woman clapped her hands in her daughter's face till she almost touched it.

At this Dick sprang forward and caught her by the wrist, and they struggled together with angry exclamations, but with a fiercer strength she shook him off, and went on exulting.

"If she had her mother's wit to lead her angel face, she 'll slip you yet, young fellow. While I 've been roving with my castanets from pot-house to pot-house, she 's wanted me here. She 's beautiful — beautiful as I was. Man alive! I 'll teach her to bring you gold, and fame if you 're worth it; the wagging and the cheering tongues — it all comes again — I see it for myself — I see it for her a hundred times over."

"Therese," like a long-drawn scream the name rang out and flashed across the room. Startled by its wildness, the woman ceased her glib utterances. John Winterscale stood at full height, the heavy chair in which he had sat, skidding from his push like a marble, to the wall; then as if on the instant he had been given sight and perfect knowledge, he moved towards his wife, but she drew back and flung her arms round Margot's shrinking form, at bay from his approach of recognition and re-conquest.

"Not yet, old man," she called in loud and strident tones, "I 'll come and snivel to you soon enough, but she and I have to face the music together; she 's got to wear the fine feathers that you stripped me of, while I make her a queen, the mistress of grand lovers, I —" the words that raced to follow gurgled in their utterance, not indeed drowned by Margot's piteous cry of "Dick, for love's sake, save me," not checked by fear of the sudden flash of a knife between the lamp-wick and her eyes, but ended by a deed with life itself. The woman dropped, to thud upon the brick floor and lie unmoving.

Again the mocking nothingness of life before death had proved itself. The wind rattling at the window, the steps of the blind man groping towards the object of his desire, his hands held high as if he would lift her round the breast and raise her to his lips; the quick frightened breathing of the destroyer and his love; all were sounds sucked in to deepen the silence which lay upon the twisted heavy figure of the dead.

What had been Harrod's thoughts in the act? No thought but a mad impulse to deliver his beloved — to push away from her entirely an evil birthright. With the fancy in his rage to shield her with something more potent than his sunburnt hand he had touched the knife at his belt—disappearance, not death, was what he asked, and now there was no disappearance, for she was there still, more hideous in her silence than in her speech, and he took as penalty an eternal recollection.

Innocent of the anguish of these young beings, John Winterscale, groping feverishly, had come near at last. His hands fell lower and he stumbled by the table; it slid away as the chair had

slid away at the fierceness of his touch. He dropped upon his knees: "Therese, heart of my heart, where are you?" he babbled, and touched one nerveless arm. He fingered the upturned palm, but unsatisfied he drew his fingers onward over the cheap fur jacket, the beaded bodice, the frayed collar, and reached the face, most mercifully shrouded in shadow. Here his touch lingered, and as he stroked with a woman's tenderness each hollow and feature, he cried out as at a new-found joy.

"Sleeping, sweetheart, come home to sleep,—I said it would be so. I will not rouse you. Shall I forgive you, forgive you for being long? Ah, yes—lie here." He crept lower till his unkempt hair in straggling grey locks swept across her brow. "Lie here." He opened his breast and laid the poor head on it. "I 'm blind, but I see you now. Ah, God be praised, I see you now!" He had sunk to her level, he muttered gladly; one hand wound in the long grey folds of the wedding gown which lay forgotten, heaped beneath the corpse, the other feeling for the breath, over the half-open rigid mouth.

And all apart from this strange drama at their feet, the drawn sword of their misery between them, the lovers stood. Children yet, but old in their sorrow, in their agonised outlook; straining towards each other in the darkness of the present, yet drawing each from each, terror-stricken before the menace of the shrouded future.

LADY TOTO'S BETROTHING

"All's right with the world. . . ."

LADY TOTO'S BETROTHING

LADY TOTO BRINSLEY and her daughter sat at either end of the fire-guard on the upholstered red leather seat. In clothes and shoes they were much in tune, but their bearing suggested feminine amenities.

It was half-past ten on a September morning, and a fire burned brightly in the drawing-room at Brockmere. Lady Toto felt chilly after breakfast at all times of the year; her daughter had surreptitiously opened the window, yet the atmosphere of the room continued oppressive.

Lady Toto tapped her toe, clad in scarlet kid, upon the hearthrug.

"I hope, at least, Moyra, you won't insult the poor boy."

"My dear Mums, how you do fly off at a tangent. Why should I insult him? I only said—"

"You only said," interrupted Lady Toto, "that you thought your engagement nonsense, and that you had no intention of marrying any one."

"Well, perhaps Lord Kinbrace will consider that sound sense; perhaps he thinks just the same thing. I should if I were he."

Moyra slipped from her perch, and with rather flushed cheeks walked to the writing-table. She picked up a letter which was lying on it.

"Read that again," said Lady Toto, watching her.

The letter was from Lord Kinbrace. He announced his arrival from India the previous Friday and his intention of alighting at Brockmere private station at 3.30 this afternoon: he sent his love, and might a carriage meet him?

"It is obvious that he wishes to come — that he is dying to see you," insisted Lady Toto.

"Oh, that's quite possible; really, the absurdity of our last encounter —" Moyra went off into a peal of laughter.

"Absurdity! What absurdity?" retorted her mother. "Really, girls of the present day have no sentiment. It was the prettiest scene in the world; the apple-blossoms falling on your hair — which by the way, Moyra, is getting painfully dark — the gentle, courtly way he held your

hand whilst we betrothed you: he looked much more like a young Cavalier than an Etonian."

"A young what?"

"A young Cavalier—a Troubadour if you like." Lady Toto floundered a little amongst her similes. "Dear boy, if I had n't been nearly old enough to be his mother I should have been in love with him myself."

"I believe," began Moyra pensively, "that when one gets on in life—" she looked at the excited countenance of her youthful mother and checked her observation; Lady Toto was shading her complexion with a tiger-lily from the heat of the fire, her short coat and shorter petticoats were cut to perfection, the sunlight glinted on her elaborate curls. Certainly, neither physically nor mentally could she be said to be getting on in life; the phrase, in relation to her, was preposterous.

Moyra, sick to death of the argument, went over to the window. The bright Italian garden; the sunny park beyond; the wide, still lake in the valley between the trees: she wanted to go out to all these things. Nature at least would

understand that an outrage had been done to her imagination; that she was too much a child of hers to be coerced to a callous conventionality of action without strong protest.

But her mother's voice still reached her in her meditations.

"Well, what are you going to do?"

"Behave with perfect propriety, Mums; what else?"

"Not take your engagement for granted? Allow him to think himself free?" Lady Toto protested.

"Most certainly he is free — he was a little boy three years ago; now —"

"Now he is a young man who has succeeded to his property," declared Lady Toto, "one of our biggest Highland lairds. You surely would not run the risk —"

"Any risk," broke in Moyra defiantly. "He 's got to feel what he 's supposed to feel — or else — or else he may go where he will. Now, Mums, leave me to manage this; don't interfere. Let it be 'Lord Kinbrace,' not 'dearest Geordie,' for goodness' sake. Don't recall apple-

blossoms and Eton collars with significant smiles; don't talk of marriage as if it were the only blissful condition of existence and don't flick imaginary bread-crumbs off his coat-collar as you do to all the young men. Give me a chance." With which parting flippancy Moyra swung out through the French window on to the terrace, leaving her mother in a state of incoherent exasperation to face the chef.

"*Merlan frit — Coq-de-bruyère* — that 'll do — What a girl she is! — *Non, Philippe, pas de soupe grasse — elle est affreuse, absolument affreuse.*"

A little later Lord Kinbrace and a friend, waiting the departure of the train, paced the platform at Paddington.

"Are you looking forward to your visit, Geordie?"

"Upon my soul, I don't know. I 've hardly found my feet in this country yet. Three years' absence is a long time. Then the remembrance of that tomfoolery last time I was at Brockmere sticks; I believe I 'm expected to remember it, that 's the worst."

"What does Lady Toto say?"

"Read her letter."

"Ah," remarked the other, handing it back, "Lady John Brinsley is a woman of the world."

"But I like her. That's the best of it, and Lord John is such a good fellow. They were awfully kind to me when I was a boy. I can't think why, for I was a regular oaf. If only that stupid thing had n't happened in the garden—it was merely a game, but Lady Toto took it seriously—it seemed to impress her so much. Every letter she has written has had something like this in it: 'Your little sweetheart Moyra has gone to study music at Dresden this winter,' or—'your little sweetheart Moyra looked so pretty at the Drawing-Room yesterday.'"

"A mere way of speaking, I expect. Women can never call a spade a spade; they are so exuberant."

"Oh, but she means it to be a spade, whatever she calls it," laughed Lord Kinbrace. "I 've a sort of presentiment that way. Truth is, the last thing I want to do is to get married."

"Why?"

"Take your seats," said the guard, slamming the doors.

Lord Kinbrace pushed his head out of the window as the whistle sounded.

"I 'll tell you why when I come up on Saturday."

"Whatever you do," shouted his friend, "be strong-minded."

But Lord Kinbrace did not hear, the train steamed past the end of the platform. He settled himself in the corner of the carriage, put his hat on the rack, took up the evening paper and floated into seas of perplexity. He felt curiously uneasy regarding the near future. To begin with, he had not a ghost of an idea what Moyra Brinsley might be like. The last time he had seen her she was a gawky schoolgirl with roguish eyes — quite taking enough to his schoolboy inexperience. "Stunning" he called her when she had run him a race down the avenue and beaten him, after the betrothal. But since then he had n't even seen her photograph, or heard anybody talk about her. Only these constant letters from Lady Toto, like a tug at a chain when he

thought himself free. And he wanted so much to be free; not for any particularly worthy purpose, but that he might go on idealizing Mrs. Duprè — the wife of the senior major in the 37th Dragoons.

He gave an impatient jerk to his cap, pulling it more over his eyes. He was aware of conflicting emotions about Mrs. Duprè. She was rather an important person to be able to think about in close relation to himself — rather a satisfaction that she was in love with him when so many older men were in love with her — yet it was curious that he did n't miss her more. The September stubble and partridges, the early meets, his new motor-car, were all such eloquent consolations for the lady's absence in India — too eloquent, perhaps; the fact was he did n't miss her at all.

"I suppose all we men are like that," he mused, his eye on the varying soft-coloured landscape as the train sped on, "— things, things, things, and people last of all." He felt, drawing this conclusion, quite a philosopher.

Yet on arrival he became again the nervous

boy. The immediate recognition of the footman who seemed to have kept his place a long time, the proprietary air with which the man seized his bag and rugs, the close-shut brougham — an anomaly on such a day as this — all began to accentuate his sensation of captivity. He wanted to suggest walking, but the coachman's eye was upon him like a gaoler's. After all, it was a short drive. Through the great iron gates with the stone, spread eagles on either pillar, down the broad sweep of the elm-avenue to the familiar oak hall-door, studded with rusty iron nails. The groom of the chambers led him along the parquet passage with its cupboards of old china and its rusty armour. The light from the mullioned windows reflected his figure in the pier-glass on the end wall all the way as he went.

And Moyra, playing Peeping Tom from a nook in the gallery, watched the moving reflection; studied the balance of his walk, the neat dark head and sunburnt skin, his chestnut — no longer budding — moustache with growing approval. Then as he reached the ante-room and Lady Toto with both hands outstretched rustled out to

meet him, she doubled back down the stairs, slipped past the verandah and fled into the garden.

Later at tea they all foregathered.

"How do you do," she said brusquely, "I should n't have known you again if I had met you in the street."

"No?" he answered, too shy to glance at her for more than a second. He wanted to say something else, to give her tit for tat for her forgetfulness, but he felt unaccountably embarrassed. Lady Toto dropped the silver sugar-basin amongst the tea cups and broke one. This was a merciful diversion, but still the conversation lagged.

"John ought to be in from shooting soon," said Lady Toto.

"Will there be any birds left for me to-morrow?" remarked Lord Kinbrace, his face in his tea.

"Partridges are the one thing that never fail here," asserted Moyra, spreading raspberry jam on a brown tartine.

This complete aloofness one from another was, according to the young people's estimate, a very fair start, but Lady Toto had never been forced

to such self-command before. She, poor lady, was sorely worried. Of love-making of a sort she had plenty of knowledge, her undefeated youth, indeed, had allowed it to be superficially perpetual. She had long ago marked herself a success. As the years advanced she grew more complacent, believing herself to be well preserved — that her appearance justified the approving words of men. In all fairness to Lady Toto be it said that compliments and archness were her simple weapons. From the light combats in which these could engage, she obtained complete delight. To explore the dark recesses of passion's possibilities never occurred to her. Such lapses in other people she associated with her pet abhorrence, tears and dishevelment. It was bad enough to have dear Lord John serious sometimes, and the worry of being gossiped about would have incited crows'-feet. "*Elle est surtout très jeune — mais au fond très pratique,*" her French governess had said when leaving her twenty-five years ago, and that seemed indeed to explain everything. Moyra was the cause of her deepest emotions — to her a most inexplicable

girl. At this moment, trying beyond measure; sweeping opportunity away with an indifference, a positive rudeness, to this young man that set Lady Toto's nerves on edge. Instinct, however, preserved her from arousing a dispute by personal comments, so she tapped her foot continually and drank mouthfuls of coffee, hoping still for the best as the pauses between the young people's monosyllables grew longer.

"Let 's go out," said Lord Kinbrace suddenly.

The long rays of the setting sun darted in at the window and caressed Moyra's pretty head. For this delightful occurrence his eyes, grown bolder now, were full of admiration.

"Let 's," she answered, starting up.

"My dear, why don't you ride," su gested Lady Toto.

"We will," replied Moyra, pleasantly, "I 'll go to the stables."

"May I put on my gaiters?" added milord.

Now indeed Lady Toto felt relieved. Lord Kinbrace's allusion to his gaiters brought a touch of familiarity, of domesticity into their strained relationship — the ice was broken.

"Gaiters — why of course, let me fetch them for you" — she became arch; "I'd love to button them on with my own little silver button-hook; now do let me, deares—" She caught Moyra's steady glance of disapproval and hesitated. Hesitated indeed, and sat down again to direct hurriedly in a changed voice:

"Ring the bell — had n't you better ring the bell, Moyra? Edward will bring the gaiters to the hall."

"Very well, Mums," Moyra replied, in a level tone of agreement. She swept her triumphant gaze to the young man standing in uncertainty behind her:

"Come — Lord Kinbrace," she said.

They rode that day and again the next. The woods were tinged with gorgeous colour; the long grass glades twining beneath nut-trees and tangled blackberry bushes harboured shadows and bright sunrays; the pulse of summer still beat full measure, defying the approach of autumn.

Moyra and her companion sucked the ripe fruit and cracked the nuts with white teeth, whiter between their purple-dyed lips, and laughed continually.

The place and season lent themselves for sentiment, for the recalling of the intimate moments of the past, but Moyra had chased recollection from her eyes when George Kinbrace almost hopefully began to look for it. Her nonchalance, her unaffected prattle about nothing at all were, in the beginning, matters for congratulation. In time, however, he began to be piqued that he had so obviously grown an object of indifference to her. "She likes men," he concluded, "she is the sort of woman who does — but I believe she has no more intention of alluding to our betrothal, or of accepting our engagement than of wedding the man in the moon. In all respects that 's a mercy" — his reflection carried him on. "Liberty forever — and Mrs. Duprè — " But this gratification was tempered by a touch of disgust; Mrs. Duprè's fair memory was tarnished when Moyra Brinsley rode or walked beside him, fresh as a daisy, chattering with fascinating irresponsibility.

She was brilliant at breakfast, and lovely at noon, a dream in her tea-gown, and the most beautiful person he had ever seen when her neck and arms were bare, and the soup was

handed round. But he liked her best on her pony in her little homespun shooting dress, when she seemed like a *bon camarade*, a jolly playfellow to ride to the end of the world with, out of sight of Lady Toto's eagle eye, out of sound of Lord John's good-humoured platitudes.

They had spent a long afternoon across country, and Lord Kinbrace was tired of the pitch-and-toss nature of the conversation which gave him no opportunity to hold her at any point.

"A penny," she said suddenly, with a roguish eye-flash from under her peaked cap.

Come, this was better, this desire for news of himself. He edged his pony nearer to hers. He began to be aware that he was falling in love with her.

"I was thinking I 'd like to travel with you," he said.

"Is my geography deficient?" she asked demurely.

"Oh, not that — but you 'd understand so well, you would n't mind missing a London season to shoot in Cashmir, and I know somehow you would not be seasick on my yacht;

as for Java and Sumatra, and all those tropical islands, you would simply adore them."

"Gracious, what a lot you are taking for granted."

"Don't you believe in instinct?"

"Not much."

"What do you believe?"

"That horses like carrots, and that — well that's about all."

"Now, Miss Brinsley, please be serious."

"Miss Brinsley is serious," insisted Moyra, blowing her nose; "I believe I've got a cold in my head."

"Welcome that, if it chastens you," answered Lord Kinbrace savagely.

"Thanks. You think me very foolish?" she enquired.

"I think you stunning," he retorted, becoming venturesome in his tactics.

The word was reminiscent, as he intended it should be. She flushed.

"That's schoolboy slang."

"Did you ever know a schoolboy who used it?"

"Lots."

"Tell me some?"

"Ralph Carr, and Tom Durand, and the little Kibblet twins—" She paused.

"And—?"

"And you, I suppose."

Lord Kinbrace grew reckless; the girl looked so lovely and she tantalised him. He put his handsome young face close to hers; she kept her eyes downcast, but for an instant he saw her bite her lip.

"Why do you tease me?" he said. "Ever since I've been here you've been actually cruel—twisted all my words to nonsense—never been confidential once. Don't you remember the apple-blossom on the pergola? Don't you remember our serious wooing?"

She gave no answer. The flush came and went in her cheek, and he, with that sudden sense of possession upon which a man stakes a great deal and loses so much, said "You know when we're married I shan't let you have it all your own way. I shall—"

She snatched the rein from his hand, she turned her face flaming to his.

"Married!" she cried, "married to you! What are you talking about? I 'm engaged already." Then she whipped up her pony and cantered away.

Lady Toto had to call to herself for consolation many resources that evening. It was obvious that some sort of disaster had happened. All day she had been full of suppressed excitement. The young people had been constantly together: the tone of their voices, the quality of their laughter floating up from the garden seemed all as it should be. She began to frame her congratulations, to wonder if the papers would say that she looked as young as her daughter at the wedding, to speculate if, as a grandmother, she should wear a bonnet.

"Let's have the '82 Perrier-Jouet, Tots, at dinner to-night," she had said, poking up Lord John's slumbering form in the leather armchair.

"My dear, our best wine when we are alone?" protested the sleepy nobleman.

"Why not when we are alone? I 'll tell Baker.

Good luck such as ours should have good wine to drink its honour." She tripped off on her errand, feeling singularly romantic and happy. Now even before the lamps were all lit she had been cast into a fit of despair. She had come down in a new pink tea-gown to find Moyra huddled in a chair alone, still in her short shooting skirt, and her face buried behind the paper.

"I 'm not coming to dinner, Mums, my head aches. Tell them to send up fish, roast partridge and apple tart to the school-room."

And a little further on, in the billiard-room, Lord Kinbrace standing on the bear-skin hearth-rug and saying with a set countenance:

"I 'm so sorry, Lady John, but I must get back to town by the 7.15 express to-morrow morning. If it is too early to have the carriage out, I could easily walk."

Then indeed Lady Toto's tears welled. Her voice was full of genuine distress as she returned to that prohibited occupation of smoothing imaginary crumbs from the young man's coat lapels.

"But, my dear Geordie, why? We shall be

miserable to lose you. You have been here so short a time, and the hounds draw at the best place at six."

"Oh, yes, the hounds," repeated Lord Kinbrace vaguely, in a tone of disappointment.

"Look here, young man," — Lord John's herculean form stumped across to them and relieved the strain of the situation, — "are you going to ride Gadfly or that buck-jumper, Primrose? I really want you to try her. She is a clinker to hounds after the first ten minutes."

"I 'm afraid, Lord John — " began Kinbrace.

"Afraid, not a bit of it; you 've the pluck of the devil. You 'll come back next month and want to ride nothing else. I 'd better have both horses out for you." And Lord John hurried away to his orders.

"You see," said Lady Toto.

"I suppose I 'd better wait," said the boy, clutching at a straw; "there's an express at night, is n't there?"

"Quite, quite late; the middle day trains are useless." Lady Toto rejoiced in the reprieve. "Poor Moyra has a terrible headache," she added

sympathetically; "I 've persuaded her to go to bed."

And, for the life of him, at the moment Lord Kinbrace could not express any commiseration.

There had been, between three and four in the morning, a heavy fall of rain. By six o'clock the rising of the earth-smell into the keen, clear air, the perfect stillness of the atmosphere, the cloudless sky offered a gladness generously. Lord Kinbrace, like all true sportsmen, loved Nature from his childhood, had ever given her his wondering exclamations at sunrise and sunset, or in the hour of storm. Now cantering with hands down and head bent towards the hounds gathered about the hunt-servants in the park, he forgot the trials of the previous evening, his wounded vanity, the nursing of his grievance; he could not be despondent, he was so glad to be alive.

Still it was evident that Moyra was not with Lord John. She was probably not up, had no intention of changing her mood. If she chose to sulk — but could she sulk? that was the ques-

tion; and she answered it by riding out of the yard with the post-bag in her hand.

"Good morning," she called out with the brightest smile, "I am not going to hunt; it's rot at this time of year. I am going to Drychester to fetch the letters."

"You're in an uncommon hurry," he growled, "for your letters. The mail train won't be in."

"Oh, by the time I get there."

"I should have thought a study of houndwork more exhilarating."

"You're to ride Primrose, then," she continued, ignoring his criticism. "Be careful — she's the very demon of a dream."

"I suppose you would laugh if you saw me laid out."

"Why, no — it would n't be funny."

Then she waved her whip and trotted off, clattering along the hard high road.

Lord Kinbrace looked after her.

"That's a funny girl," he muttered, steeling himself to an independence of judgment. "The man who is going to marry her will have his time full."

He reproached himself for a lack of courage with Lady Toto; he might so easily have asked her who the fellow was. And the thirst for the knowledge worried him for an hour or two. It took the zest out of the pretty hound-work. It caused the huntsman's cheery notes to get on his nerves and made his hands hard on Gadfly's mouth.

"I say," Lord John trotted up on his fat bay cob, "are n't you going to get on Primrose? Only half an hour to breakfast, you know."

Lord Kinbrace was in a temper for a skirmish. He vaulted from saddle to saddle with alacrity.

"Take her down the main ride for a bit," urged Lord John. "Whoa, old girl!—that 's it, give her her head."

Kinbrace set his teeth; the brute meant trouble, he hated black mares with a large white in the eye and a perpetual swish of the tail.

He turned her from the hounds; this she resented. He was obdurate—she obstinate. Still on the way he wanted to go she went at last—but raced entirely out of control; her jaw upraised, her head sawing from side to side. In

vain he strove to steady her. He saw ahead the rabbit wire and pheasant hutches, he saw moreover the approach of Moyra, the reins on her pony's neck, the open sheets of the "Drychester Weekly Times" obscuring her face. Five minutes later the following: a receding horse at a gallop, a receding pony at a trot, both riderless. Upon the ground a crumpled heap of man and maid, alive and speaking, but hopelessly disarmed. Everywhere a flutter of letters upon the grass like so many doves in a picture book.

"Oh — oh — oh —" in crescendo, and Moyra grasped a shapely leg, stockinged pepper-brown.

"God Almighty!" quoth Lord Kinbrace hoarsely, "have I killed you?"

"Oh," cried Moyra, "oh!" She leaned heavily against his shoulder and he entwined her in his arms all unconscious that further and further into the earth he ground beneath his heel Mrs. Duprè's last letter freshly forwarded.

"Is it awful pain?"

"Partly pride," she muttered. He thought she moaned.

"That beast!"

"I told you!"

"What did you tell me?"

"That she was a beast first and a darling afterwards."

"I have no recollection of it — did you?"

"Certainly. Why are n't you hurt?"

"I wish I were."

"I don't, for you must carry me."

"Is your leg broken?"

"No, but it aches."

He stood up and lifted her; at the moment she seemed a featherweight, though later she confessed to ten stone.

And Lady Toto at this period became magnificent.

The riderless steeds reaching their stables had stunned her to an awful terror. Recovering herself she had rushed hatless and in her turquoise-kid shoes towards the wood, followed by the helpers and the gardeners. In good time she saw the two — saw Moyra still lying and Kinbrace kneeling beside her. Then she halted, finally returned, and drove her retainers behind their walls. She exercised a superb command. "My

child may be dead," she assured herself—"quite dead, but after all it is a crucial moment." Then for the first time for years she went up to the yellow boudoir and cried.

Thus Geordie Kinbrace carried Moyra home alone. She held to the mutilated post-bag with the letters crammed in again—all except Mrs. Duprè's, that indeed had been buried under a fern root. To his surprise he found no one about. He walked with his burden through the open hall door down the parquet passage and laid her unaided upon the sofa in the drawing-room.

"Will you go to bed?" he asked.

"Bed?" opening her eyes wide, "I 'd rather be here."

"I shall go for the doctor," he said.

"It 's not the doctor I want," she declared.

He sat down on the edge of the sofa and she let him take her hand.

"But, Moyra, you must see him. I am miserable about you."

"Don't be miserable. I am rather happy now it is over. I might have broken my neck, you know."

"It was awful —" he said.

"The moss was so soft," she answered.

"You are too brave by far."

"Don't you like brave women?"

"One ought to, but I 'm such a d—d coward myself."

"A coward!" she cried incredulously, "not you, Geordie."

It was the first time she had used his Christian name; he felt a lump in his throat.

"I can't face the thought of your marrying any one but me," he said in irrelevant desperation.

"In fact, you 'd rather I had been killed just now?"

"Almost," he groaned.

He felt her breath on his cheek. Her cap had fallen off and her curls were all tumbling into her eyes. He forgot the accident altogether.

"Look," he said, "I must know. You must trust me. Tell me the name of the chap."

"Tell you? For what reason?"

"I can't stand uncertainty — guess-work. I want the truth."

"The truth." She raised her bewitching little

face to his as closely as she dared. She put her hands on his shoulders, pulling herself up.

"Well, if you would be very kind and get me some Pomade Divine, some coffee, some marmalade and some buttered rolls, I 'll tell you the truth. I 'm engaged to you."

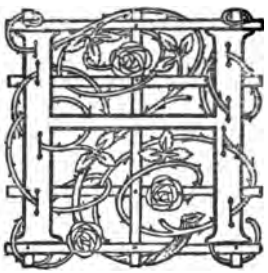
"You witch," he cried; then, seeing a flash of heathery hills in her blushing cheeks — of azure rippling lochs in her expressive eyes, he forgot to be strong-minded, forgot to argue the point, dropped in his joy to soft Gaelic speech and clasped her to his heart.

"Mùirnean," he said, "Mùirnean;" which, being interpreted by Lady Toto, meant the best.

THE DOUBT

"When first we met we did not guess
That Love would prove so hard a Master . . ."

THE DOUBT



HE threw the end of his cigar into the fire. "Don't you think that you are making an unnecessary fuss," he said to her.

The surroundings certainly gave reason to his remark. A boudoir hung with rose damask panels and curtains, and carpeted by thick grey pile laid beneath artistic furniture of ancient history and modern arrangement; under tall palms and rose-shaded lamps flowers grouped, scenting the air; no ugliness, no dissonance of outward objects to mar the luxury that spelt itself divinely. Yet the crouching figure near the hearth wept and wept, while the man beside her reproved and explained with easy calmness.

"You see," he went on, in his sympathetic voice, "I don't mean to make you unhappy; I won't if you'll only understand me; but one can't force one's self to feel what one does n't feel, don't you know?"

If only she would look up, his eyes, he thought, could do the old work of conquest, he could

compel submission. But her slender form, in its soft satin draperies, remained bowed with grief; he had only the back of a golden-brown head, heaving with baffling abandonment, to look at.

"Myrtle, this is absurd — really you are behaving like a child."

She lifted her face to his now with a sudden movement of decision.

"You love someone else," she said, "not one reason you 've given me is a true one — not that, nor that, nor that," she counted on her fingers, regaining composure as her conviction became more assured; "the only possible meaning of it all — you love someone else."

He was taken aback. He had relied on her vanity to dull her perception.

"Your suggestion is distinctly wide of the mark. Besides, I don't see —"

"You don't see," she interrupted, with a torrent of words — "you don't see that it's just what makes despair for me. All that you 've been telling me in this hour is nothing now I feel sure of this. You said mysterious things that showed

you were thinking about her — as you talked you had flashes in your eyes — you must have been seeing her face; it's all so plain.

"But I never said I loved any one," he prevaricated.

"Why need you say? There's been something about you all the time that was new. Not your kind words of dismissal — horribly kind and formal — not that — something quite different. The woman you love has n't given you herself as I have; she has excited your imagination, and I — I only your desire."

She had risen, this woman, with her tear-stained, childish face upturned to the man who was asking his freedom, to a pathetic dignity. It cut George Farquhar more sharply than her hysterical reproaches.

"Dear, you 've been all that's good and sweet," he began.

"Good and sweet!" she ejaculated. "You choose your epithets for me ridiculously. Can't you see that I 've loved you to distraction, and bored you horribly as the result; that my brain, or soul, or something equally abstract could n't

satisfy you — in short that I 'm a failure, though 'a deuced little duck' — was n't that your favourite phrase — when I don't make a goose of myself."

She swayed forward in the chair, she touched his knee with her hand. A note of cajolery crept into the last words. Farquhar knew that from an exalted moment she was dropping into bantering reminiscences. At all costs he must check her.

"Your memory is vivid," he said, looking impatiently from the clock on the mantelpiece to his watch. "I 've said many things when I felt inclined to say them; now I must go — it 's late."

"Oh, please not. You can't call half-past nine late?"

"Yes, I do."

"And are n't you coming back?"

"Certainly — sometimes. We shall be the best of friends;" he felt his freedom near, and added warmth to his words, "don't think that I shall quite forget you."

She laughed bitterly.

"Do you think she will remind you in little things? When you try to kiss her, will she put her head so"—she suited the action to the words; "when you say 'How I love you, carissima!' will she purse her lips so?—" the pantomime was repeated.

Farquhar was taken off his guard.

"Look here, Myrtle," he retorted, "you shan't speak about the best woman in the world like that."

She clapped her hands with nervous energy, but answered him through set teeth.

"You've given yourself away at last. I knew you would. 'The best woman in the world!' It's Mrs. Neyland. That's your continual description of her. You silly, why didn't you deck her out with vices if you wanted me not to know? If you wanted me not to care"—her voice trailed off—"why didn't you kill me?"

Those wailing sobs, how he hated them. But Farquhar had reached the door; he could not go back as consoler—nothing would do any good; he had got over the worst, and it was absurd to make things more impossible for himself. She

had plenty to do, plenty to amuse herself with, plenty of creature comforts to soften the blank of his loss, "for it will be a blank," he said to himself; as he ran down the stairs he wondered at his own popularity.

There was a keen north-east wind blowing in Grosvenor Place, but, wrapped in his heavy overcoat, he fought against it till he reached Piccadilly; he shrank at the moment from the seclusion of a cab.

"Paper!" shouted a newsboy, "paper!" Farquhar's eye rested carelessly on the fluttering bill in the little blue hand: "Twenty thousand mounted men wanted for South Africa. Sharp engagement."

"That beastly war," he muttered, and turned into his club.

The cheerful carelessness of the surroundings changed his sensations. Thoughts grew agreeable again, he began to allow his imagination to flutter forward to the morrow. At any rate the present day and its discomfort was ended; tomorrow he would see Mrs. Neyland. How graceful she was, and, without prejudice or nonsense,

what a grip of life she had. He conjured up a vision of wide, shadowy eyes, of long-fingered white hands, made for caresses; he recollected the fascinating turn of shoulder and hip in a characteristic attitude, he spoke grave words to himself about her, but in thought he was enveloped by the rising incense of her magnetism. "I love her," he said. "Thank the Lord, I am free to love her. To-morrow we shall be a little nearer; the next day and the next —" he caught his breath quickly. He shaded his eyes with his hand; it seemed as if he would throw a transitory shadow over a dazzling prospect.

In the boudoir in Belgrave Square the woman he had left had dried her eyes, but like a wild creature she wandered to and fro, tossing the flowers he had sent her from their vases, sweeping his gifts from their place. "What can I do, what can I do?" she cried, and nothing gave answer to this unbridled misery.

Presently, shaping a plan, she ceased to walk. "I 'll go to Mrs. Neyland. I don't care if she knows now. I 'll tell her. She does n't love him yet, but she 's going to love him, and she 's

so splendid — he won't get tired of her." She uttered her thoughts aloud, and the tears of her despair fell again at this culminating idea.

But in her mind, as she went out, she had no scheme of action. Her child-nature, undisciplined and undeveloped, called out for consolation, that was all. There were no reserves or self-pride to conquer; she wanted to hold out her arms to any one who could offer escape from pain and say, "I can't bear it — make me happy again. He made me so happy while he played with me."

"Yes — Mrs. Neyland is at home."

The tall footman, as he answered, looked at her enquiringly. She clung to her scarlet cloak and hood that he tried to relieve her of; the heavy velvet seemed a sort of armour of defence; her tea-gown beneath, she fancied, must look drenched with tell-tale tears. Up the wide marble stairs, hung with masterpieces of Burne-Jones's women of romance — pale women of unsatisfied passion — she flitted nervously by her guide.

On the landing the servant passed her quickly, and entered a room on the right. She heard a

voice say: "Did n't you understand, Edward, I could not see any one? I really must —" The broken sentence augured disappointment. Myrtle felt that she had reached a gate of deliverance; she could not at any one's bidding turn back. She hurried forward, and she and Mrs. Neyland faced each other: one just inside the threshold of the room, the other still outside.

"You want to see me? Come in. I 'm afraid you 'll find me in great disorder. I 'm sorting my books; one so rarely gets a spare evening." Mrs. Neyland rubbed her dusty fingers on her lace handkerchief, waiting, expecting an explanation.

They knew each other so slightly, these two, standing together in the high, faintly-lighted room. On the floor, on the sofa, on every available chair, books lay heaped. The fire gave out little heat; it must have been recently lighted. Audrey Neyland had evidently found a haven for industry in a disused drawing-room. She herself, tall above the average, in a long mauve bedroom wrapper, her auburn hair framing a clear-cut face and serious hazel eyes, seemed to

have been recalled from dreams and visions, from blessed content, to talk to this woman who had intruded so strangely upon her solitude; a woman eight years younger than herself, about whom she had sometimes smiled with gayer companions, in her gentle, absent-minded way, as society's prettiest feather-headed chatterbox. Yet in her attention now she was perfectly civil.

"I wanted to see you dreadfully," Myrtle burst out.

"Yes?"

"Will you mind what I 'm going to say?"

"But why should I?"

They sat down, Mrs. Neyland in a high Elizabethan chair, against which her hand leant a little wearily.

"I 'm perfectly miserable," Myrtle gasped. "George Farquhar does n't love me any more. I know he cares for you."

Like the first rumble of a thunder-storm over sleeping mountains the broken words of this confession struck upon Audrey's heart ominously. They crashed upon her dreams and dispelled them. Her face, ordinarily pale, had faded to an

ashy white; she needed deep resource not to be driven to self-betrayal.

"Why do you come and say these things?" she answered in a slow, faint voice. "Don't you think it is a mistake?"

"If you were as wretched as I am you 'd think nothing a mistake except to go on being wretched. I felt if I told you, you 'd be sorry, and I 'd feel happier. You won't let George make love to you?"

The inquisitive eyes fixed upon Mrs. Neyland's face danced imploringly. In her naïve frankness Myrtle was seeking comfort for herself. Audrey knew that she would speedily find it.

With sudden strength of mind she asked:

"What has George Farquhar been to you?"

Myrtle dissolved into tears.

"Everything. I know you 'll despise me, but I 've never been joyful except with him. It did n't seem to matter, one was so glad. You don't know him very well yet, but he 's so clever, so kind. He was awfully kind to me, — nobody else was. They thought me stupid, extravagant, he never said I was either — such a blessing!

But I really believe I am stupid; I can't learn, I can't change, I only want to be happy. Now he 's gone there 's nothing left."

"Nothing left!" said Mrs. Neyland, interrupting this torrent of sobs and words. "Of course, one can't judge for other people. You seem to have a great deal still. Your —"

"Please don't make a list," Myrtle interposed. "Nothing counts."

"But things have to count, have n't they?"

"No, not really." Myrtle shrugged her shoulders defiantly. "I suppose I shall go to the devil."

"But that 's nonsense."

"I dare say it sounds nonsense, but how is one to be happy? I 'm useless at home. I think I am like one of the children. I want some one to hold my hand and then I might get along somehow" — she paused. "Mrs. Neyland, won't you persuade George Farquhar to come back to me? He would do anything you asked."

The ghost of a smile crossed Audrey's face. There was pathos in this grotesque conception of the emotions and their career. Was it possible

to believe that the love that fled could return at bidding; that the thing overpast could be again. She looked curiously at her questioner, measuring her own love for George Farquhar and his for her against the feeling that all apart from her had tied him to this woman; wondering jealously if, even for one half-hour, more than the mere attraction of face and figure had kept him captive. For, strong, self-reliant, pure in nature as she naturally was, her intellect crying out at the lack of logic in the thing, over her own soul the fascination of the same man had swept. She asked no rescue, no check, to what seemed to her inevitable; "For life — for death" quivered unspoken words upon her lips when they met. Now before the last revelation, which a few hours later would have sealed her fate, all unasked, all undesired, salvation had come. Brick by brick, built by the childish confession of this deserted woman, a bridge of deliverance spanned the torrent of her course; "Come" those tearful eyes, those babbled confidences seemed to say to her, "come and walk with me all the way — I trust you so."

Audrey moved in her chair as if in pain, lean-

ing forward a little and looking into the dying embers of the fire.

"I don't think that George Farquhar will do what he does n't wish to," she said, gathering her wits to an assertion that voiced a presentiment. "I shall see him to-morrow — then he 's going away for a long time — to the war, I think."

"To the war!" ejaculated Myrtle.

"Do you think that strange? I think most surely he will go."

There was relief in the answer.

"Oh, I don't mind. I only thought he hated the idea. Perhaps when he comes back he 'll be fond of me again. There's always that hope. Better the certainty that he 's gone than that he 's here and does n't care. But, even if he has n't told you so, I 'm sure he 's in love with you."

"Your imagination runs away with you. If he 's finished loving you, as you say, he will not begin loving me. You told me he was clever."

"That has nothing to do with it. He loves you differently. It 's difficult to explain, is n't it? I don't want the sort of love he gives you. If I could only keep him as he used to be. But

I don't suppose it would be any use talking to him about me. He dropped me like a stone at the bottom of a well to-night. He won't fish me out again."

Audrey stooped to find a book.

"Was it only to-night?" she faltered, before raising her head.

"Yes, only to-night he told me straight; he has not been the same for a week — oh, about a fortnight, I think."

To one of these women the agony of this interview demanded imperatively its close.

"Won't you go home now," she begged. "I expect you sleep well. In the morning things won't seem so bad; in time you will forget him."

"Forget him!" Myrtle cried, "oh, I can't forget him, only, Mrs. Neyland, if it does seem better in the morning, and I don't see him any more, I shall begin flirting. I know I might go all wrong again — unless — unless you 're friends with me. I do want to be friends with you."

"How can I help you?"

"Ever so much. You 're so splendid about George. I never thought you 'd be like that.

I thought you 'd be cross. If you would be friends I might be good; it would be worth while." She fell on her knees impulsively by the almost rigid figure. Involuntarily the elder woman shuddered. She saw her course so clearly; outlined and unavoidable. Mentally she stepped on to it, and grew old in the effort.

"My dear," she said, forcing herself to a bantering tenderness, while her body, tense and unwilling, drew away from this clinging creature, "I can't be Father Confessor and Mother Superior all in one. But why should n't we be friends? Come," she said, raising her, "it 'll be all right."

"You 're an angel!" — the exclamation was full of new satisfaction, "it 'll be a sell for George. He 'd never expect a thing of this sort, would he?" But to such a query Audrey could give no reply. She rose silently, and together they went down the stairs, and parted.

The next day, without ceremony or question, the doors were opened to George Farquhar. The marble stairs, as he hurried up them in those first minutes of lamplight, seemed to him as steps to

heaven. Mrs. Neyland's boudoir door was ajar; unannounced he pushed it open. She sat within on the soft green cushions of the window-seat, peering through the latticed panes into the greyness of a January twilight.

"Audrey," he said, his eager voice anticipating her greeting, "this day has been interminable."

"Has it?" She turned to him wearily, indicating no gladness.

Why did she sit there, he thought, so far from him. Was it to urge him the quicker to her side? Was it to keep him in suspense? His heart was beating to suffocation, he could not answer his own self-questioning. As he remained standing, she rose, and came to him. She put her hand on his arm.

"Do you remember yesterday? You said you knew something was imminent for both of us. I know now what that something was — the end. Will you kiss me once?"

The finish of her sentence struck him with passionate force. He forgot the enigmatical beginning.

Kiss her — his arms were around her, his lips

on hers. Surely thus he reached the fulness of experience, this alone was first and perfect love; all else the years had held grew meaningless.

She threw back her head suddenly and looked him in the eyes.

"I 'm glad I love you," she said, "glad I love you so dearly, because it makes it easier for me to tell you the truth." Their arms fell apart as she spoke, and Farquhar felt instantly that there awaited him a proscription.

"Your friend was here last night," Audrey went on. "I 'm sorry you thought well to make her unhappy."

So this was the bolt from the blue. He ground his teeth. Myrtle had stolen her revenge. She had known the woman she would have to deal with, simply from his credentials; she had poured out her griefs and her wrongs to gain her sympathy. An insane desire seized him that he had taken her at her word and killed her before he left her.

"How dare she," he burst forth, "how dare she come to you. I 've treated her better than any other man would have done. You know I

don't love her, you know—" Audrey stopped him with an imploring movement.

"Don't make excuses. I was going to tell you that I understood quite well without any explanation; at least I mean to understand. I 'm sure you love me now, sure to the tips of my fingers, to the bottom of my heart. I want to keep you where I put you, right up there in my estimation"—she lifted her hand—"leave me my blessed illusions. Don't make excuses."

He stood with lowering brow, silent, helpless at her command.

"You see, nothing matters for myself, but for her everything matters. She 's pretty, she 's silly, she is n't half awake; she 's simply made for a man's light fancy, just as she was for yours. I can't leave her, now I know the truth, can I?"

"You 're not going to tell me," he cried hoarsely, "that you will give me up because she may go to the devil if you don't?"

"Yes."

"What can she feel for good or bad, really? It will go for nothing, your sacrifice, and you 'll certainly ruin me."

Audrey shook her head: "No," she said, "I shan't do that."

"But how will you help?" he asked desperately.

"I 'm going to be her friend. I shall try and paint in the details to her life—it 's crude outline at present."

"You don't care about her."

"Why not? She is my redemption."

"What do you mean?" he insisted.

"I mean that if it had n't been for her I should have done all that you wished. There was nothing to hold me back from anything. I 've had only unhappiness in my life. It was so easy to be imposed upon by happiness."

"And I love you—I love you," he cried in torture.

"You know," she went on, as if afraid of keeping anything in reserve at this moment of renunciation, "things had no meaning till you came; all the things I thought I liked gave no answer to the questioning in my heart."

"Audrey," he implored, "don't, for God's sake, tell me this! Don't show me Paradise to make it a mockery to me."

"I merely want you to know," she continued, unheeding, "that it is n't exactly prudery, or even principle, that keeps me from you; it is something quite different — so much greater, so much stronger. Now, while I tell you all this, you seem quite far away. I suppose I am on the bridge she made for me; I can't get off it if I would."

He looked across at her with troubled eyes. For another woman's conversion he would have summoned the power of his personality to aid. Remonstrances, threats, caresses, they had done their work before, in minor crises, but in a situation such as this they were blunted — useless. In spite of her love for him this woman could not be influenced, as he could influence; she had dominion over a spiritual exaltation which carried all base things before it, and from her reacted upon him, to lift him, at least for the time, with all his cynical self-will to the level of her resolution, of her sacrifice, with irresistible force. Never had he dreamed such suffering possible, — this awakening of his slothful soul as it struggled through its bars to meet hers.

"What do you wish me to do?" he asked painfully at last.

Audrey fixed her great eyes upon him. "She asked me to send you back to her," she said.

He made a movement of indignation.

"And you expect me to do this? God, if she were the last woman in the world, if she were —"

She interrupted him. "Hush, I expect no such thing; the impossibility of it seems as certain to me as it does to you. I 've only given my message."

"To see what I would say?" he retorted.

"Perhaps."

"I shall go to the war; I shall pray that every bullet that is fired will spot me," he cried incoherently.

"It would be braver to live," she answered, white to the lips.

He was on his knees now. He held her hand and kissed it desperately.

"Audrey, have mercy! Is there no hope?"

"Yes, a hope with wings."

"I love you so," he repeated.

"And I you." She touched his wavy black hair with lingering tenderness.

"Why are you changing me?" he groaned, "why are you making me ashamed of all I've done — of all I've wanted to do?"

A sudden gladness irradiated her face; it seemed as if angels, comfort-laden, were wheeling about their desolation. She must give him courage, he whose weakness had been his undoing.

"Do you see now that duty is stronger than life or death," she said, "and that love's duty is strongest of all?"

How could his lips refute what his wretched heart echoed. He rose to his feet without a word. The newsboy's cry of fresh war-news floated up to them, the cabs dashed past outside, the noises of the street reached them; expressions of all the commonplace things of commonplace life that waited to prey upon their purpose. But in this moment of triumphant self-abnegation they stood guarded.

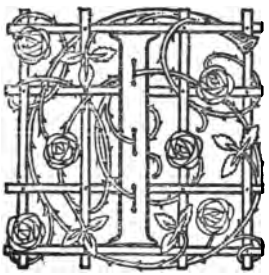
"I always thought you the best," he said at last with a passionate reverence in his voice;

"whatever you had done I should have thought you that—but I verily believe you're strong enough to make me a different man."

"If that is true," she answered, simply, "you are giving me a great victory."

"TILL SEVENTY TIMES SEVEN"

"When the sands on the seashore nourish
  Red clover and yellow corn;
When figs on the thistle flourish,
  And grapes grow thick on the thorn;
When the dead branch, blighted and blasted,
  Puts forth green leaves in the Spring,
Then the dream that life has outcasted
  Dead comfort to life may bring."



RECKON it's a case of 'kiss and good-bye' at last, little girl. Life's been a deuced sight more comfortable these six months at Hallows Creek than I've ever known it, but it is plain the place is getting too hot to hold me. I think the game is pretty well played out; in future you'll have to cut the cards for some luckier fellow. Eh, Rosette?"

The man had thrown one arm over the high rail of the paling against which he was leaning, and chipped at the hard wood with his knife to hide his embarrassment.

The answer he waited for was long in coming. There was scorn in the girl's swimming eyes as she looked at him.

"So you're off," she said at last.

"If I want to keep a whole skin on my body," he expostulated; "you know my position here with Malone; Harry might have been a better pal."

She flushed.

"He's been as good a pal as you'd let him be. You began his ruin — Seth Malone is about finishing it."

"Look here," he broke in.

But she silenced him.

"Be honest. I might have done some good with my boy a year ago. You came here not to help me but to steal my power and to make him your cat's-paw. What does it matter to you that I love my brother, and that by loving you I'm untrue to him? What's it matter to you the wreck of both our lives, as long as you get off scot-free. Ah, go! — go!" She burst into convulsive sobbing.

Her weakness gave him renewed self-assurance.

"So you class me with that shady Melbourne stranger who's played all the mischief. Thank you. You women are extraordinary. In your hearts you make us kings, then curse us with your mouths as if the devil were in us."

"No difference between you and Seth Malone, in your ways, in your principles," she exclaimed at his taunt.

"Principles be hanged."

He picked up his slouch hat from the ground, put it on and lit his pipe: then his arm stole round her waist.

"Look here, little girl, be fair."

She made an effort to remove his arm, but he kept it close; in time her head sank against his shoulder.

"How shall I live without you?" she said desperately.

"Ah, that's the question," he answered gravely, as if he had found it suddenly important. "You know well enough that if I had sixpence in my pocket or the prospect of a roof we'd share it. Will you believe me that if I get a start again in Old England, or anywhere, I'll come back and marry you? Swear you believe it!"

She nodded, only half convinced.

It was a strange scene this. The telling of an old story on this desolate station in Australia at the moment of sunrise.

The man was young and comely, but for premature coarseness of mouth and nose; the girl was younger, large-eyed, clean-cut in limb and feature, but pale as a ghost in the uncertain light.

The wooded hill upon which they stood dropped steeply into the gully. There the tree-ferns spread graceful fronds and the darker foliage of the sassafras shadowed them. A brook meandered like a silver ribbon between the cliffs; down in the plain among the orange groves it widened into a river. The awakening birds were twittering — the mocking note of the jackass, the "caw" of the parrot, sounded now and then in the gum trees, and still at such an hour of freshness and peace could be heard the murmur of men's voices, the popping of corks in the drinking saloon a hundred yards away.

"Then it is to-night, Jim," she said, raising her eyes to his at last. "Quite certain to-night?"

"Certain," he answered straightening himself; "and if in the interval I can fill my pocket from that thief Malone's, so much the better."

She shivered and walked away from him. He called her back.

"Look, Rosette," he said, in a tone of genuine emotion, "it's hard lines for you and me, but don't think me a cur if I play up there to-night" — he jerked his arm over his shoulder;

"I must. Come," he added, "bring me luck. Stand beside me and sing that 'Good-bye' I like. Do you know your voice has more power over me than your eyes, it'll let me go a better man. Promise."

"What are you asking me?"

"Everything."

"And I'd give you everything," she cried out passionately.

Then he kissed her.

The movement in the tavern had ceased at last; as she went slowly home the sky was golden. Down in the painted verandah darkened by its overgrowth of jessamine and clematis, stretched at full length on the narrow bench, two figures lay in deep sleep. Unkempt, exhausted, they had thrown themselves carelessly there, for neither Harry Paulevrer nor Seth Malone, the fever of their gambling upon them, had slept in bed for nights past.

Rosette knelt by her brother's huddled figure and her tears rained upon his face. He was so piteously young, he was buying his experience at such an awful price. She had followed him from

Melbourne to this wild loneliness; she had tried to be a mother to him, to give strength to him, to advise him and slave for him. She adored him. All in vain; he was tossed like a plaything between the influence of two bad men, strangers to his past; one of these men she loved, the other she hated. She had been proud of Harry once; he was strong and active, his character clean, his face open, even pure. Now as she looked at him his eyes seemed swollen, his mouth had fallen into loose restless lines, his golden curls were matted with neglect.

She let her head fall upon his breast.

"If only the world would change," she moaned, "or that we could all die." And the sun, as if to mock her, crept in unclouded brilliance higher into the heavens.

After a time she heard the jolting of the mail-buggy on the rough track. It came into sight drawn by an undersized team and clothing the wattle and the wild cherry trees in the garden with dust. The noise disturbed the sleepers.

Jim Escrick came out from the house, and Malone turned over, stretched out his bony

arms, kicked off his shoes, and stood up, six foot two in his dirty socks. His lips, cruelly narrow, seemed to fall inwards in his curious uncanny face; a yellow, wrinkled forehead sloped backward from narrow brows to where the sandy hair, already sprinkled with grey, grew in short erratic tufts over his long skull, like pampas on a prairie.

"Waal, waal, that's quare," he said, winking from one to the other of his unappreciative audience, "very quare, indeed; a regular excarshion sort of a dream, too, all along of card-playin' and brandy. There was the King of Diamonds, Miss, a very rum tarn-out, oncommon like that cove over yonder" — Jim became attentive — "a runnin' off with the Queen of Hearts — a straight tip that, I reckon. Waal, hop, hop, comes the Knave of Clubs, that was trumps, sees them half way across the Paramatta River — 'Ho, ho!' says he." Malone assumed a peculiar expression, but the rest of the sentence was strangled in its birth; he had barely time to spring aside to avoid the rapid blow that cleft the air.

"What's that for, mate?" he drawled, clenching and unclenching his claw-like left hand, but displaying perfect self-control before this fierce assault. "Dreams is dreams, as facts is facts — you pay your money — if you can — and you takes your choice. Sonny," and he shook the still yawning Harry by the shoulder, "wake up; here's a chap blind drunk at seven o'clock in the morning, with a desire for tarning our brain-pans into pulp."

"You lying dog," shouted Jim, "do you think I don't understand your low dodges?"

"Shut up," said Harry, "don't make such a d—d noise."

"Noise! it's more than a noise!" Escrick set his teeth. "Can't you see where the brute's driving you — you fool Paulevrer?"

"I'm not in your leading-strings, thanks. Malone's as good a right to speak as you; I've no reason to believe you're a better sort. If you go on taking the law into your own hands, Escrick, the sooner you leave the place the better."

Jim assumed a sarcastic tone. "There's

gratitude. Do you think without your asking I should have wasted six months trying to make a cub like you find your level in the world, you think you 're the only one to draw a prize in this infernal lottery of existence. Well, mark me, you 'll draw something else presently and not from me."

He threw the bitter words at the young fellow, and stood with folded arms waiting their effect. Harry, white with anger, menaced him.

"You clear out," he said, raising his arm, "d' ye hear me. Clear out."

But Escrick did not move — not yet the moment for his obedience.

Then Harry made to fling himself upon him, but Rosette was between them. She hung with all the weight of her strong young body against her brother; she kept them by sheer force apart, and gave them both a queer hesitation.

"You must n't," she gasped; "Jim 's not speaking truth. He 's only jealous of Malone. You were such pals till he came. Don't strike him now, Harry, for pity's sake. Jim," she stamped her foot, "explain to him, can't you?"

"What's there to explain," said Jim, laconically. "I don't want to quarrel with your brother."

"And he does n't want to quarrel with you — say it, Harry," she insisted.

"What's there to say," he answered sullenly, as the other had answered. But the force of his anger had weakened; he felt the thrill of this girl's entreaty. Before the failure of his youth's bright promise, she had been his day-star. He was making a mess of her life pretty freely now; he had sense enough to know that, and conscience enough at this crisis to spare her further misery.

"Friends, then," he said, and looked across at Escrick.

Jim looked at Rosette, and cast the remaining shred of his better nature into the scale with his selfish love for her. Together they outweighed his irritation and insolence.

Malone, who had with intention shifted the odium of this quarrel entirely off his own shoulders, drank a glass of whiskey in lieu of breakfast, leaning against the open window; presently the tumbler slipped through his fin-

gers, and broke on the tiles at his feet. Over the girl's bowed head the young men had clasped hands.

The sunset had faded into the clear, pale sky of twilight, when four riders, their jaded horses stumbling along, returned from a day's round.

Rosette, unable to bear the loneliness of the house, had gone out with the others. She rode now beside Jim Escrick; his arm hung loosely over her white pony's neck, his dark, reckless eyes searched hers.

"Don't be low, little one, I 'm not worth grieving over."

"No," she said, looking up at the first stars.

"But you 'll sing, won't you," he reminded her; "I count on it."

"I 'll sing," she answered, wondering where she could find the voice for aught but lamenting.

Paulevrer and Malone rode jovially in front. In fact, for the men it had been since morning a day of good-fellowship. They had light-heartedly played with the usual subjects and jokes which bound them together, and invited no quarrel

beyond the cheerful argument of the minute. They had the wanderer's temperament, all of them; the power to make to-day as good as yesterday, to forget as quickly as they acquired, to lay down a feud in the environment where it had been born and strike out for the next one in a pleasant temper.

Not so Rosette. She rooted on the ground where she fell. Engrained in her sensitive nature a strong faithfulness, she suffered cruelly at transplanting.

As she slipped off her pony at the entrance to the verandah, she entreated him.

"You 'll say good-bye to me — alone — before the song, Jim?"

He bent from the saddle and caressed her hair.

"On my oath," he answered; then he looked over his shoulder up the hill eagerly at the lighted windows of the saloon.

The men ate supper yawning and grumbling, then without rest walked out, and though the girl stayed at the table, Jim forgot her and went with his companions, his eye on Malone and his hate for him increasing.

For a couple of hours she trusted him, expecting his return, and waited, battling with the dread of the difficult empty days that lay before her. Would Jim's departure mend matters for her brother — would he gain thereby? A thousand times no, while Malone remained; there would be in the loss nothing but loss, and her own despair.

The footsteps that sounded near the house from time to time, never lingered, but passed always up the hill. The suspense of his belated coming, the longing to be near Escrick in this last hour, was growing more than she could bear. So she took her hood from the peg and followed him.

Never had heaven framed a more splendid night. The moon was at its full, and gave to each feathery, floating cloud a silver lining. The stars shaping the Southern Cross blazed in and out among lesser kin, like diamonds amidst pearls.

Yet there was no one abroad to gaze and marvel, but this young girl; and she, thinking only of her purpose, ran quickly on without reflection.

The roughly boarded door of the saloon was open; well, indeed, for the atmosphere was terribly oppressive, and the wreaths of bad tobacco-smoke choked and half blinded. Across the settles against the walls the station hands dozed, drank, or wrangled. Two swinging lamps, one under a painted glass shade, the other without a shade at all, hung high in the ceiling, and gave a poor light. The few dilapidated tables were surrounded; the gamblers that Rosette sought had usurped the crooked-legged one in the corner.

As she entered, she became instantly aware of the emptiness of Escrick's promise. The game, only the game, fired his eyes and threw complete absorption into his attitude; he would play to the last minute, and then go. Rosette, for all he knew now, or cared, might be a hundred miles away.

Malone was dealing the cards with the slow precision and continual calculation characteristic of the man. Under his elbow he had laid a bag of almost ostentatiously presented notes. He looked like some old-world wizard; there was

strength in his badness, cleverness in his machinations. Escrick knew this always, but more than ever to-night. Harry the boy was winning; his face was suffused with a rosy flush, he talked garrulously during the deals. Escrick was astute enough to realize this success as no mere chance. Malone was merely getting Paulevrer utterly into his net to make the final break-up irremediable, his revenge on Escrick more complete.

In a moment of impatience Jim had kicked his chair back and stood lounging against the table. Though Rosette could have touched him with her hand, he appeared indifferent to her presence, even if he had noticed it. Was it possible that he had forgotten the promise she had made him, as he had forgotten his promise to her? As in her misery she wondered, he lifted his head, and his glance, to her surprise, fell on her at once; there was no uncertainty in it. He must have known her beside him from the beginning.

"Sing," he said in a low tone of command rather than entreaty. "Sing," he repeated again as she hesitated.

She felt the strength of his desire through and through her frame.

How it was she hardly knew, but the song began. Not the Yankee plantation lullaby or music-hall ditty she usually gave them, and the chorus of which would rise, a jovial roar, from the half-tipsy company, but Jim's ballad, a present he had brought her from Henderson one afternoon. New-fangled they had called it, but she had sung it camping in the bush on long summer evenings. Jim remembered the first night she had mastered it, kneeling in the winter firelight; he had loved her better then. Now, as the words "Falling leaf and fading tree" floated out in her clear, sweet voice through the dense, heated atmosphere to the calm night-air, he seemed the least moved among those rude squatters who left, in a few moments, the cards and counters in careless disorder and sat as if spell-bound to listen.

It was no nightingale's clear treble, no prima donna's studied bravura, this girl's singing. As the swan in its death-throes gives a sobbing dirge to the world once, and then silence, so it

seemed that all the longing and despair Rosette had ever felt or would feel again were concentrated in these tragic minutes.

She sang the song once and began to sing it again. No one told her to cease, for to these rough men her voice, figuratively, was as the voice of God, and gained, while it gave its sweetness, the mastery it claimed.

Malone seemed to parley with his familiar spirit, angel or devil; he found it, his head sunk on his breast, engrossing. Harry's expression, the plaything of occasion, had grown sunny with satisfaction and pride in his sister. He had no apprehension of the singular pathos she displayed. And Escrick, his face buried in his hands, watched through his fingers the bag of money which lay before Malone on the stained baize cloth.

He was encountered by the strongest temptation of his strongly-tempted life. Never had action appeared more easy. The other lamp had died out, for the barman, taking advantage of the lull, slept; the moon illumined little, rather aided the darkness. A moment's presence of mind and the coveted money his — a horse, ready saddled,

tethered outside — and so into the world, to begin again.

Such thoughts, disjointed, perilous, insisting, chased and rechased each other through his mind. He was tired of the losing score on the tablets of his experience. One simple act and he could wipe it off, to begin afresh — one wrong to win a right, after all.

And Rosette? She loved him — she was singing to make him happy — she would not fail; be even glad afterwards that she had helped him to be free; that she had so innocently but so effectually served as accomplice.

There was a sudden instant of complete darkness — a cloud had passed over the moon. The coincidence stunned his conscience, and by a deed he scotched his doubts. His hand slid down from his face and across the table; then he went out at the door slowly, as if overcome by the music.

Rosette, seeing all, still sang:

> "What are we waiting for, O my heart?
> Kiss me straight on the brow — and part —"

The passionate words burst out, wrung from her own broken heart, to keep the listeners as

the witch kept the sleeping sailors long ago, till her lover had time to vault into the saddle and gallop away.

It had come at last — the end. Trembling she sank onto the chair Jim had pushed back; the acuteness of the sudden silence in this dark, peopled room was remarkable. But the spell removed, they immediately forgot its potency in a renewed desire for self-assertion. A hubbub of talk broke out; the barman knocked over glasses and pipes in needless activity to renew the lamp to a spasmodic flame; Seth Malone coughed, spat, and drew himself straight in his chair. He hated his period of weakness; he became fiercely energetic, gathering up the cards and squaring to the table with a muttered undercurrent of contemptuous speech, directed against all and none.

Harry rubbed his brow, "That was a good song," he said. "It's your deal, Escrick" — but the light streaming down now showed Rosette upon the chair.

Malone looked at her, his eyes screwed closely; then his hand, holding the greasy cards, groped

about the table. Through suspicion his knowledge became rapidly conclusive.

"Gone, by h—, gone!" he shouted, sweeping the cloth where the notes had been. Then at full height he towered above the trembling girl, and cast his imprecations over the whole saloon. "He 's cut it, the rogue, be d—d to him. You, gal, with your cunning wiles are at the bottom of this, you—," and the foul word hissed through the air. "Where is he? Out with the truth, or there will be killing, d' you hear—not my first job in that line—killing, bloody killing;" in his infuriation he foamed at the mouth and gurgled like an epileptic.

Rosette drew away as his fist threatened her, but there was no quiver of emotion in the ghastly pallor of her face. She bore the burden of her sorrowful knowledge and her sacrifice with a great courage under this man's insults; only before her brother she quailed. He had crept up to her and had put his hands heavily on her shoulders. He had understood the situation slowly—knew at length that the money had gone and Escrick with it—but he knew best of all that his sister had

failed him. What extenuating circumstances for her? Her action so obvious, the result so successful. The web of deception was too well woven to be unravelled by any excuses; he did not invite them, but condemned her unheard.

"My God, Rosette!" he said, full of the bitterness of his disappointment, "I 'd have staked my soul on your honour. You loved that scoundrel, but, dupe that I was, I thought you straight. Well, there 's an end to it, and the station should be proud of such a well-matched pair. I know the country better than he does, aye, and I 'll track every inch of it till I shoot him and curse him for the dog he is." Then, turning from the dumb agony in her eyes, he went out as Escrick had done before him. But for his exit there was no tethered horse saddled; he made down the hill to the stables running, and most of the men followed.

For a minute, stunned by the injustice of the accusation, sick unto death with this load of complicated trouble, she swayed as if she would have fallen. She steadied herself, however, against the loathsome table with its scattered cards and cigar-

ends and dribbles of spirit and water spilt from glasses raised by shaking hands, till, looking round, she found herself, but for Malone raving in the corner, deserted — the door wide — and the sky outside lightening before the dawn.

She began to consider coherently now; to reckon that Jim would have made for Blowcaster and so to join the railway-line, that he would have ridden down the narrow path with the broken gate as the quickest way to get there. It was that way Harry would ride also — he would guess as she guessed — and perhaps it would be at the gate, where he would have to check his pace, that she might stay his wild ride of pursuit and make him listen to her once more.

So she turned toward the hill and climbed it as the others went down, and began to run through the thick grass which, twisting round her ankles, impeded every step.

She crossed the shoulder. The moon hidden by clouds, the darkness was still great, but, her eyes growing accustomed to it, she saw indications of the valley beneath and of dark woods nearer. She felt the path now, the pebbles flew

under her feet and she sank into soft dust. Then she stopped — she had reached the broken gap in the palisade; it was there her brother would come.

It had been broken down by cattle and no one took the trouble to repair it, but piled it with rough stones. Over these Harry would not be able to gallop, but must pick his way. She heard already the thud of the horse's tread behind her as she stood coolly in the opening. Her brother was thirsting for her lover's life; with his knowledge of the road he might so easily overtake him. But it was she who had let Jim go and it was she who would let him get away alive into the world where he would forget her.

She had no power, while thinking of his life, to consider his dastardly deed. Her only wish was to have a delaying touch upon her brother's rein, to bring him to reason, as she held reason, with her old compelling persuasions.

Standing between the wooden posts she smiled now, her face turned to where the dawn would break, as if in prayer for the two men so dear to her.

Harry in the full stride of his canter approached. He had chosen the way as she divined, from the same idea; he knew of the gap and the stones, but he had no intention of labouring over them. His horse was agile and trained: put him at the obstacle and he could jump it easily and gather fresh impetus for faster pacing in the quest.

Therefore, galloping down, the blood in his head, in his eyes; his mind one-idea'd, revengeful, he saw the dim outline of some figure in his path. With lack of reason he suspected Escrick's relenting, and swearing to offer him no chance, he cocked his pistol and fired. But it was a woman's sharp cry that echoed to the rash shot, and his heart stood still, for the figure lay as it had fallen. Quickly he dismounted and bent over it.

"My God," he groaned, striving to loosen the handkerchief at her neck, "Rosette, speak to me, for the love of heaven, speak to me!" But there was only silence, and he gathered her into his arms, and looked at the trickling blood from the mark on her forehead, upon the purity of her placid face. There was no sound anywhere, yet the birds were preparing to wake, and soon the

cold wind of the hour of dawn made him shiver; it sighed above the grass under the distant trees. The horse, wandering around, began to tear and chew the dry scrub.

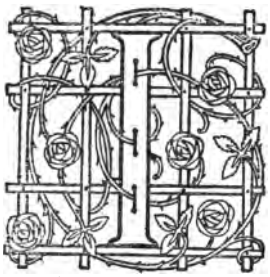
The light came, and the grey changed to yellow, and the yellow to the orange and crimson forerunners of the sun. He knelt there, babbling of his childhood's devotion, of his love now, of his need for her forgiveness; but there could be no answer; after all, for her and for him it was the end.

MRS. LEONID

"Strong is your hold, O Mortal Flesh!
Strong is your hold, O Love!"

This is the experience as my friend related it. If I fail to share her sympathies, I tell the tale as it was told.

MRS. LEONID



THINK it is a puzzle to my friends that I, with my notions and habits of other times, should be spending the season in a Mayfair hotel with its show-cases, flower-stall, public restaurant, and string band, instead of hiring, as I have generally done, the sober unpretentious house in the market.

I confess that I am myself in a measure puzzled at such encouragement of extravagance *en fauteuil.* I pay fabulous sums for garish apartments, I scribble the name of the advertising silversmith upon my visiting card, I mass gardenias amongst my laces, and eat my dinner to the tune of "Monte Cristo" with half the demimondaines of Europe and their attendant swains at my side, as if there were no such things as fixed incomes and infinite ideals. But having something to forget, I bring thus a new interest into life and should be satisfied.

The fact is, I am one of those unfortunate beings — a woman of perception; gifted (accord-

ing to the chroniclers) with "rare insight," and I have been the witness of an incident so baleful to my remembrance and yet so inexplicable that when I repeated the story to my best friend she merely smiled, whilst I, in the telling, shuddered as at a catastrophe of personal import.

There is a mistake in one's construction when it offers an inviting surface to the limpets of tragic events in other people's lives. Comedies — all well and good — one may, at other people's expense have one's laugh. But the holes in the coat of the tramp, the frightened looks of the child in a next door neighbour's garden, the traces of tears around the eyes of the young typist engaged by the hour, should not in the narrow way be asked to "stand and deliver"; they belong to the wide road that leads to destruction and for the sake of one's nervous system should be avoided. At least, that is the conclusion I have arrived at; that is why I jingle through a butterfly existence in the most fashionable resort of the moment. Others by these means have grown impervious, why not I? One should not, to quote the philosopher, have more than enough.

If, however, the cardinal sin of sympathy is subjugated — made inactive towards the passive weepers by the wayside, what about the situations that are as bloodhounds at one's throat, and pin one to sight and sensation? These are of destiny's breeding — incomprehensible, yet revealing the soul of man beyond human explanation. Let me tell you, as I told my best friend, what under such circumstances came and arrested me.

Following the maxims of my upbringing, I have for the last fourteen years hired a house in London for the months of February, March, and April. Honestly as I detest house-hunting, I 've steadily refused to complicate my life with a permanent possession. The house in the quiet region where I could be of the world yet not in it, was no longer available; I discovered that the dwellings of my friends — to be let — did not justify my friends' recommendations; I think, then, it was on January 9th that I looked up a well-known house agent. The junior partner of Hay & Horner was away on a holiday in Spain, but the clerk in charge, appraising me — I gathered this from his manner — as somewhat exact-

ing, produced an enormous tome, and prepared due consideration for the range of Madame's luniform desires, for, as I told him, I infinitely preferred crescents to squares, and streets for me were an abomination.

"No. 27 Ronda Road," he murmured above the ledger in the tone of one who reads for the first time what he has to explain by heart — "a spacious house with a garden, close to Vauxhall Bridge, a little out of the way, perhaps, but convenient for Ascot races." He looked over his glasses and interpreted my movement of contemptuous negation.

"Paddington Green," he went on placidly, "moderate rent, owner, Mr. Savile Smith, accommodation for six servants, no bathroom — that will hardly suit."

"St. John's Wood — bijou residence — owner, Miss Totty Major — furnished by Maple — rent to be paid to Sir . . ." He slid off the dangerous ground and came up smiling, his hand sweeping the page as if removing all prior suggestions.

"No. 13 Pandora Terrace — the very house — owners, Mr. and Mrs. Leonid — going abroad

for some time — will let for three months with option of purchase, terms moderate, every modern improvement, perfectly quiet, facing private gardens."

"Leonid!" What a queer name! My fancy was struck with it instantly. I was seized, Heaven knows why, with a burning desire to ask personal questions, but a feeling of reticence prevailed. I was looking for a house; I had made no remark about Mr. Savile Smith, I had passed over Miss Totty Major and her rent collector in stony silence, and now why should I enquire of this excellent clerk the manner of life of Mr. and Mrs. Leonid.

Leonid . . . Leonidas — was that the connection in my mind? The vision of a white line of road twisting up and up the blue mountains of Greece from the plain of Thermopylæ; all the great feats of arms, of Spartan endurance, swept, but for glorious memory, into nothingness by the overwhelming force of an alien army — one against so much. The details of the tragedy rising at this moment to remembrance and framed there in the peaceful setting and perfect pastoral beauty

of the shores of the Eubœan Sea, appeared to hold a whimsical significance. I turned for an instant and peered through the plate-glass window into the street, looking as London streets usually do; a thickening fog had captured the sun of the morning; it was only half-past three, but the lamplighter was going about his work.

"I think," I said slowly, as if I had given long reflection to the matter, "I will go and see this house of Mr. Leonidas — Mr. and Mrs. Leonid," I corrected. "I shall go to-day; will you give me a card?" The clerk answered with alacrity, closing the book, "Certainly, and I may as well persuade you to look in at two other houses, all on your way down. But I feel sure that No. 13 Pandora Terrace will attract you."

Simply for the sake of saying that I had done so, I entered the two houses he had mentioned en route. They neither of them gave any present joy, nor offered a promise of it in the future.

But if the truth were told I went through the rooms with unseeing eye. I was in a mood of abstraction, weaving possibilities about 13 Pandora Terrace and its owners. If they were both

Spartans it augured ill for my comfort. Possibly he was the Spartan and she, with oriental blandishments, strove to overcome his prejudices. I imagined Mrs. Leonid a lady of ample bosom encased in flowing silk draperies and wearing pendant earrings glistening and glittering. I felt certain about those earrings, and that her divan would be heaped with Persian cushions. But for him I could mould no shape whatever; he remained altogether undefined. As the driver went slowly down the Terrace looking for the correct number I chided myself for such ridiculous fancies. "They are probably *pôt-au-feu*, second rate, and their house as unliveable as all other houses," I declared. Then I pushed my head from under the roof of the hansom and looked upon No. 13.

The exterior was certainly prepossessing. The walls had been newly painted, and the window boxes were filled with dwarf holly neatly cut and bearing berries. The blinds were down, but here and there I could perceive a light. The three low steps to the enchanting myrtle-green door were of marble, scrupulously clean, and above the lintel hung an old Venetian lamp holding an

electric globe; the knocker was peculiar—a brazen raven, its great eyes made of some curious iridescent pebble shining in the light. I sprang out of the cab, rang the bell, and banged the forbidding bird against the panel, as interested now in the house as in the owners. "13 Pandora Terrace," I decided, "shall be mine. Who knows whether I shall not buy it and find at last an artistic city hearth." I felt already the exultation of possession.

They took a long time to answer the bell. I rang again—and a third time, not over-patiently.

At last, to the extent of about four inches, the door was opened and a neatly-dressed maid, her hair parted under a French cap, brought her gaze, brim full of anxiety, to bear upon me.

"I have come to see this house," I said, looking at her eyes, their agitation appeared so uncalled-for. "It is, I understand, to be let. It has grown dark early, but I should like to come in now." I held out Hay & Horner's card.

She did not attempt to take it, but stood there whispering to me: "You can't come in—indeed

you can't — it is awful. Please go away. Come back next week — some day — she is — "

The little quavering voice ceased; it seemed to me that some one from within had dragged the girl back, for feet scuffled on the tiles, and the door, released, swung wide in the draught. Then a hand steadied it, a light shot through the darkness, and I was face to face with a tall woman. "Mrs. Leonid," I just breathed to myself and went forward to meet her.

"My maid is stupid," she said in a clear, slow voice with a peculiar lengthening of the vowels in accent. "I think that maid-servants are an overrated advantage. I am particularly anxious that you should see this house if you are in need of one. I consider it charming in every way." The manner in which these assertions were made rendered any criticism superfluous. I suspected that Mrs. Leonid was a lady who shrank from contradiction and I decided to be diplomatic.

"I should very much like to see this house if it really is not an inconvenient moment," I assented, and longed to add how much more I desired to see Mrs. Leonid. She still stood

with her back to the light,—I could only discern the outline of an imposing figure.

She walked past me deliberately now, opened a door to the right and with a quick movement switched on the electric light in all the chandeliers of a spacious chamber. My first impression of the room was the contrast of verity to my vision. There was no scope for oriental idleness here. I saw stiff gilt settees, white walls, ormolu tables. Then my eyes became glued with startled fascination upon Mrs. Leonid.

She was unlike any one I had ever seen before. Her skin was pale and so clear as to be almost blue from the veins that coursed beneath. In profile her features were nearly perfect, but her chin was too long and pointed and gave extreme length to her face. Her hair of glinting gold, undoubtedly natural, had in one single lock turned gray. This fell over the brow with a sideway sweep as if to shade her deep penetrating eyes, for her eyebrows were ever so slightly marked, and the innocence of her forehead from this cause contradicted the hardness of the jaw and the firmness of the close-lipped mouth. I should

judge her age to have been about forty, but she was one of those women who have no age. She could never have known blushing youth, she would still be in her prime twenty years hence. Her figure was statuesque and broad-shouldered; her dress, in the best fashion of the day, fitted closely, but her hair, knotted strangely in meshes of black lace, hung half-way down her shoulders. In her ears she wore rings. I felt a quick thrill of excitement when I saw them. They did not glitter like those of my fancy, but fell in two huge opal-tinted pearl-drops like the unopened buds of an orange flower. A quaint conviction seized me that if I walked over to her and squeezed them between finger and thumb, red juice like blood would flow from them and trickle down her white, uncovered neck. The incorrigible absurdity of my imaginings annoyed me. I coloured and hastened to force some trite remark. I felt sure that my idiotic stare surprised her.

"This room is lovely," I said, turning my gaze vaguely around; "I am not sure, though, that I think the Louis XVI. style conducive to comfort."

"Comfort!" She spoke the word with acrid emphasis. "That is the watchword of the present day — if you wish to lounge and loll, there is my husband's study."

So I had touched the cloven foot of Spartan severity. She withdrew her uncomfortable eyes from mine. "Take care of the step," she said as she swept on, and I, with ever-growing interest, followed.

The little room with its tent-like hangings was below the level of the drawing-room and lit by tall candles. I looked round for Leonidas — Mr. Leonid — but he was not there. Upon the writing-table some books, a few letters, and a number of cigarette boxes; but it was obvious that he had not been writing for hours. A sofa filled up one side of the room and every available square inch of wall was hung with treasures of travel. Inlaid pistols from Macedonia, pipes and scimitars from Turkey, Tunisian wallets, — a medley of immense interest all indicating the collector.

"Mr. Leonid is fond of distant countries," I said.

"Yes," she replied, "he has travelled, and we are about to travel again." She laid special stress on the "he" and "we," and finished off the sentence sharply. I saw that she was fidgeting to pursue our investigations in other parts of the house, but I would not be removed so easily. If I was not to see Mr. Leonid, at least I would gain a clear idea of Mr. Leonid's belongings and build up therefrom a graven image when I came to make this attractive den my own.

I walked over to the fireplace and touched the tiny silver and copper works of art upon the mantelshelf; I had rarely seen such uncommon curios out of the glass case of a museum. As I turned my back to the ledge, I noticed that he had but one picture in the room,—the full length portrait of a young girl in a white dress; the attitude was so graceful, the face so lovely, that my attention was riveted. Above the inlaid frame hung a delicate ivory crucifix, before it burned a little red light as before a shrine.

"Do tell me who that is." The impulsive demand trembled upon my lips. I turned to Mrs. Leonid, but she had passed back into the

drawing-room and when I followed and looked into her face all desire to press the question left me.

"Do you read?" she asked abruptly. She fingered a heap of paper volumes. Memoirs of the Inquisition, Life of Napoleon, of Catherine of Russia, of Sforza, of Marat, — I read those names quickly among many others. "I only care for memoirs," she added.

"Of monsters, I see," I remarked rather foolishly in a sudden longing to annoy this woman and defy her empiry.

"So you consider the makers of true history monsters," she answered with a shrug and contraction of her eyes. "How truly British-matronly! Only weakness I should have called a crime and these people were strong. They knew what they wanted and they held it — while they could. I will put the books away. Come, we have not seen the bedrooms — the nurseries."

I felt like a rag doll with the sawdust running out. I had laid myself open to the snub and received it broadside. I followed her sheepishly up the stairs, resenting her every movement, but

powerless to curb a desire to know more of her. She told one nothing, but gave pregnant impressions, and the uncanny feeling she had aroused at first sight grew in me to positive fear, while it irritated me to think her, as I did, the centre of mystery. The house was strangely quiet, there were evidently no children, but she showed me luxurious attics for mine with a supercilious air, as if implying that women with children were rather an encumbrance upon the face of the earth than otherwise. Since my remark about the books she did not deviate to general topics. All her conversation was in the strict way of business. The number of baths for the rooms, the nature of the hot-water supply, the charge for possible breakages. In quite unwarrantable fashion she appeared to take my future occupancy for granted, and I, enthralled by the perfect arrangement of the house, went weakly after her almost like a sleep-walker and found no ground of dispute.

At the end of the long passage on the second floor, I saw the little maid who had rebuffed me on my arrival. She stood on sentry outside a door.

Mrs. Leonid approached her. "Go down, Bessie," she said.

The girl swayed as she listened, but she did not obey.

"Do you hear me, go down."

The slow voice seemed to cut the air like a knife, and to reach the trembling figure on its edge. Bessie winced and, bursting into sobs, went, slipping past against the wall as if to avoid a possible blow.

I thought that Mrs. Leonid would throw light upon this incident, but she was silent about it, and laid her grasp on the door-handle.

"There is a woman sleeping in here," she said, after a pause; "we shall not wake her. I think you ought to see the room; next to mine, it is the best in the house."

We entered. The room was totally dark, and a pungent smell of medicaments filled my nostrils — then a faint scent of violets.

For the space of a second Mrs. Leonid switched on the light — but in that second what a revelation!

On the bed raised upon a carpeted daïs, lay a

figure covered by a big embroidered sheet. Round the still lovely face — radiant even in death — the long brown hair was spread; the hands were clasped upon the breast and one great nosegay of violets lay between them. In a flash I recognised the original of the picture in Mr. Leonid's study. Sleeping — God! No! She was dead — dead. The shadows round the eyes, the awful stillness of the form told their tale; for the sleeping in this world there would be no more waking.

"Mrs. Leonid," I said, breathing heavily as the darkness fell upon us, "Mrs. Leonid," I repeated — the utter futility of giving information to this woman struck me as I gave it — "she is no longer sleeping; don't you know that girl is dead?"

By this time we were half-way down the passage. She stopped in surprise, and looked at me over her shoulder.

"That room would do for your husband," she observed in a tone of consideration. "It has a south aspect. It might need repapering — we would consider the possibility."

Whether I were walking on earth or on air, seemed of small moment. Everything seemed to rock round me; the confusion of my ideas was unspeakable. We had reached the hall again and she waited. It was evident that she intended me to go. Undoubtedly I had seen all that was of concern for a house-hunter. But with my pulses beating at fever rate I threw manners to the wind.

Was there no explanation possible? Out of my brief experiences in this house, I had built up an overwhelming necessity for explanation and I would not, so far as human determination went, be baulked of it now. And yet, who or what could give me an explanation; the whole situation as far as I was involved, was incongruous. I had no business in this house at such a time, I had no right to be told its intimate history, and positively the sooner I went out of it the better; but, in a frame of mind of almost frantic superstition, so persuaded was I of fresh developments, I still delayed.

With uncertain voice I plunged into the commonplace. "I think I must have left my handkerchief in the drawing-room."

"If I find it where shall I send it?" Mrs. Leonid asked steadily.

For all reply I pushed open the drawing-room door, and this time she followed me.

A man was on the hearth; he had thrown his hat and umbrella carelessly upon the delicate silk of an arm-chair, and was pacing to and fro.

"Mr. Leonid," I told myself, and heaved a sigh of relief.

He looked past me as if I had no existence, straight at his wife.

"How is she? — tell me at once. I 'd no idea she was so ill — I 've torn home, but the fastest is the slowest now. How is she?" — his voice was quite hoarse with emotion.

Swiftly, as a man when a shot has been fired turns his telescope towards the mark, I looked at Mrs. Leonid. I drank in the wave of fury, call it by no weaker word, upon her face.

"I thought you had left the office extraordinarily early," she said, ignoring altogether his question. "Cyprian, this lady has come to see the house — she will be a probable tenant — is

there anything in particular you wish me to say to her?"

If she intended this as an introduction, it failed signally in its purpose. Mr. Leonid took no more notice of me than if I had been announced as a new chiffonier from Mellier. He strode towards his wife and his hand brushing his moustache trembled. I could see the sweat-drops upon his brow, and, by the strained position of his lithe figure, all the agony of his impatience and endeavour at control in their struggle.

How young he was! Probably not more than two or three and thirty. His face was most refined, the pose of his head distinguished, but all the passion of which human nature is capable surged in his blue eyes.

"How is she?" he repeated. "I insist — tell me."

"She is very ill," came the sullen answer at last. "Really, Cyprian, your ways are remarkable."

"Very ill," he repeated — slowly — helplessly. "I thought it was merely a cold — very ill and I was not told." Then his anger burst out. "How dare you?" he exclaimed; "how dare you?"

If Mrs. Leonid had been a different woman she would have implored me to go before the crucial moment, the moment when either she or I would have to state the truth. It was obvious she would have been glad to be rid of my presence. The suavity with which she talked of me was forced, but her self-command was great. The ultimate victory was so indisputably hers, that a little restraint now would be to her advantage.

She faced her husband with an impassiveness which, with my knowledge, I positively admired. The formality of her words and speech became exaggerated.

"Cyprian, I must ask you before this lady goes to attend to business."

Attend to business! Rather — and wholeheartedly — he would have killed her. There was not the breadth of the silk rug between the tall standing figures.

"I won't be put off," he went on doggedly; "understand that. You have lied to me enough. I would go to her instantly except that I might do her harm. I'd rather suffer anything than do that."

"Oh, Leonidas," I thought, with a dreadful pity at my heart, "oh, Leonidas, you are fighting awful odds."

There was a gleam in Mrs. Leonid's eye — there, and gone again instantly.

"She is sleeping," was all she said.

"Sleeping — then she is better —" The gasp of relief that he gave was pathetic. "Why couldn't you tell me before? I shan't leave the house — when she wakes I shall be ready." He fell back on the sofa as if he had been suddenly released from the rack: the torture of the last few minutes had distorted his handsome face strangely. He became in reaction almost irritable — looked at his watch, bit his nails, frowned at me as if he wished me gone, and yet, when I made a movement with my foot, half deciding to rise, gave an involuntary start of apprehension as if he would have me stay.

Mrs. Leonid took a paper from a drawer and approached me.

"You will find here everything about the house — terms — furniture, &c. Perhaps tomorrow you could let me have some sort of

answer. A good many people are after it, but I should like to give you the refusal. I don't think this evening" — she broke off — and the hesitation implied absolute dismissal.

There was nothing for it but to go. As I moved, Mr. Leonid said to her, "Have you booked places straight through to Verona?"

"Yes, but for Tuesday, not Monday."

"Why not Monday? You had better go Monday."

"And you?"

"I never intended to go Monday. I shall not go if Eva is ill. I don't stir till she is well — when she can come with us."

"Ah!" The exclamation was so peculiar that for the fraction of a second I shut my eyes. I had an idea that when I reopened them Mrs. Leonid, like some deadly panther, would have sprung upon him.

"Eva will not go with us," I heard her say and her tone had become monotonous again. "We shall go together, you and I, and see all the countries of the world if you like before we come back — but we are going alone."

"I 'll see to that," he answered roughly; "if I do not choose even now to let this house, I shan't."

"If you don't choose," her lip curled.

All this time I was standing waiting to take my leave. Two women looked down upon this young man with such different sentiments. I saw the yawning abyss before him, and Mrs. Leonid driving him slowly to the edge of it—every tick of the clock hastened his doom; of what avail his recalcitrant words?

"Come," he said, leaping up at last, "I am going to her; I have never disturbed her yet, why should I now? Her fever must be better if she sleeps, and the crisis must be past. Thank God I have the nursing of her back to strength."

He went to the door. Mrs. Leonid looked after him, but made no movement to check him. Was it possible that she would let him go to discovery without a warning? It certainly seemed so. He had almost left us when for the first time he recollected my presence and spoke to me with boyish embarrassment in his apology. I think he read some sort of understanding in my eyes.

"I 'm awfully sorry to have been so rude; you see I was quite upset—such a horrible thing to have Eva ill—congestion of the lungs, and they never told me."

"Who is Eva?" I interrupted boldly.

"Eva?"—the light that flashed into his face as he prepared for explanation made it positively beautiful. "She is my niece—Mrs. Leonid's niece, I mean. She is the most lovely thing in the world; too good for it, though, and much too good for the next. She is a sort of person that all unhappy people should be able just to look at, not too closely for fear they might hurt her." He laughed a little candid laugh and then grew grave again. "Fancy, for three whole days I have not seen her, and she has suffered," he added appealingly. "I could only send her violets to show her where my thoughts stayed."

"She holds your violets," I said.

He gave a start.

"Does she, how do you know?"

"I have seen her," I answered.

He threw his glance back to Mrs. Leonid with angry surprise.

"So strangers are allowed where I am shut out. Can you explain —?"

"Everything." Her voice deepened in her wrath till it really resounded through the room. "Everything! If strangers are allowed to break in upon our private affairs, well and good, let us keep nothing back. You said that Eva was your niece — mine if you like — but for Providence she would have been something more to me, and to you. She died to-day at twelve."

There are moments in life that pass, like the scorching of lightning upon the tree, over the soul of man. The instant comes and goes and may not be stored by description. The fishwife who learns after the night's storm that her sons have been swept into the vortex of the ocean; the girl who is told on the eve of her wedding-day that her lover has been killed by a simple street accident; the man mounting the steps of the scaffold will understand what I mean. They are, so to speak, moments beyond human endurance — yet endured.

Such a moment had come to my poor Leonidas. In Mrs. Leonid's opinion he had stood

with his back to the wall long enough — he was even reckoning on escape — and she struck him to the earth.

I never remember anything so ghastly as the silence that followed her words. If only he had cried out and raved as a young man in such suffering might rave; but no, he stood stock still and the features of his face under a sort of ashen hue appeared blurred; of his eyes I saw nothing but the dark sockets.

And the woman went on talking in spite of it all; no longer angrily, now she had delivered the blow, but sententiously — stupidly.

"I would have broken the truth to you more carefully, but this lady appears to take a vast interest in other people's business; her house-hunting should be rather an amusing occupation. Eva was unconscious, she would not have known you; she died without pain," and while she gabbled I watched him. "The funeral will be on Monday. Then on Tuesday we will start; it will be the very best thing in the world for you, the very best."

She ceased and I heard the utterance of quaver-

ing, husky words such as might be spoken by a senile old man. "They 're lying to me — lying — lying —" and he, moaning like an animal in pain, slid back from the door against the wall. With all the significance in the world Mrs. Leonid took his place and opened the door for me.

And, coward that I was, I was thankful to go now — quickly from this hateful house, about which she would ask me no more questions nor expect any, I knew well.

If only once I could have gone up to Cyprian Leonid and taken his head to my breast like a mother and kissed him for Eva's sake, how glad I should have been. As I went out he turned his eyes, grown luminous again and full of an ineffable sorrow, upon me. In the hall I heard her repeat — drawl the words without a quiver of emotion :

" Don't stand there, you had better sit down. Let us go over the route now, it will distract your thoughts ; " and he answered her, this time in a tone grown horribly mechanical, " Yes," and again " yes."

My hansom had been waiting an hour. As we drove off, I saw that the light in the Venetian

lamp was extinguished, and the doorway in complete shadow; the raven knocker was not to be seen. It suited my mood to believe it hopping beside me as I went; faster and faster, a real bird of ill-omen, croaking cruel mandates.

Of course I had had no explanation really; nobody had told me why Mr. and Mrs. Leonid were man and wife, why that strange hard woman had thrown a glamour over his young personality. "Glamour?" What a surmise! I flung it from me; she was a demon, a vampire; my unorthodox soul shrank from the union with fierce protest. Yet there it was — existent — unchanging — the thing that has to be.

How well I could picture those travellers; he bowed in figure — aged — asking at first from every rose-garden and lemon-grove and poppied field blessed memories, and she driving him ever on with matter-of-fact words and intelligent synopses of historical fact, drugging him with constant cold change till she had bound him hand and foot, altogether submissive to her conventions, leading him blindfold, the only friend, Azrael, that he would ever smile to see again and greet.

As we emerged from Kensington, the clock on the barracks indicated five. "So one hour of tragedy," I said, "and all life appears of different complexion." But I felt that the normal would be reclaiming, before long, its hold upon my constitution, as indeed most successfully it has done. I drove to Hay & Horner, and found the office open, and the clerk still with the ledger in his hand, dotting down fresh addresses.

I went up to him and threw his crumpled cards upon the desk.

"One house is dirty — the other hideous — the third — " I hesitated a second, not for lack of an epithet, but from a sudden feeling that to this complacent clerk it would miss its point — "the third," I repeated lamely, "won't suit."

He readjusted his glasses with an air of surprise, and consulted the ledger.

"No. 13 Pandora Terrace, that is? You do not like the house? I am astonished; it is beautifully decorated, they tell me, and that must have appealed to you. Mrs. Leonid is a lady of such taste."

THE LAUREATE

"Who knows what's fit for us?" . . .

HE bacon fizzles; there are possibilities in the scones; my eggs have not bust. Wake up, Alban."

Joss Harvest spoke over his shoulder as he moved his hands actively about the kitchen range.

"How it rains," his companion remarked from the window-ledge.

"Yes, it's the deluge — do be persuaded. I have been cook, clerk, nurse to you these last few days. I can't leave you in this exile — come."

"No, Joss."

"Heavens! what perversity!"

Harvest emptied the fried eggs and bacon into a Delft dish.

"Eat at least, and let's have another argument."

Alban Broad smiled. He came towards the food standing on the bare wooden table. The young men sat together now in parley.

"If you would only believe me," declared Joss, his mouth full, and entreaty in his honest blue

eyes, "there's no outlet for your genius here. How can you rhapsodize on a clay soil in a draughty farmhouse at this time of year? A treatise on decaying agriculture may perhaps result — but a poem — !"

"Wrong. The back-water of things breed inspirations; from my point of view this is a back-water of no mean interest."

"Why?"

"Because of my strange lovers."

"Lovers? There are lovers all the world over."

"Ah, but there's a purpose about mine that asks to be immortalised."

"Nonsense, you're pale as a ghost; you've overworked your strength and let that cursed imagination get the better of you. Do you suppose any one would recollect you as the champion swimmer of Summertown, as the tinder-box of New? To get off the line of life as you're doing spells disaster."

"You exaggerate," said Alban, a shadow on his eyes; "but of course to you, with your conventional ideas, my action seems extraordinary."

"It seems to me simply waste of time and talent, old chap."

"Something grows," came the retort, "something indefinable. Besides, the place holds a charm. The sun shines on occasions, you know."

He gave a little gesture towards the homely walls of the kitchen, where they breakfasted, to the rain-streaked diamond panes, and laughed.

Joss Harvest leant on his elbows moodily. He resented his lack of influence with his life-long friend, but curiosity stirred as to the force that withstood him. They had been boys together, later college comrades, till the parting of the ways took Harvest to the City and sent Alban, with an adequate income assured, afloat on the tide of independence. He had always borne, through the twenty-three years of his life, the stamp of a certain genius, but so sanely, so placidly, a future of action had seemed before him, offering the artistic soul of the actor the greater possibilities; and now —

"What keeps you here, tell me then?" Harvest, at this point of reflection, began again.

Alban pushed back his plate, and flung, on an impulse, the window wide. "How can one explain by explaining? I 'm enamoured of my world out here, and that 's about all."

As in close proximity they looked out together, the fast-falling rain, blown inward by a strong westerly wind, stung the faces of the young men; Alban's, dark, clean-cut, eager, his lower lip moving nervously between his teeth; Joss's, round, weather-beaten, anxious, his hand tugging at a fair moustache, his blue eyes contracted.

The whole landscape before them lay in mist. A slight rising of ground towards the horizon, otherwise a perfect flatness of dull brown and early green. The second week of April had yet to run, the spring was late. Between the level, unhedged fields a river coursed, swollen now, and overflowing its banks, and casting a light of turbulent water over the monotony of the land. Through the dampness of eyelash they peered beyond, and another farm near the river could be seen, beside it a mass of foam beneath the mill-wheel, and a group of stunted, still, leafless fruit-trees. A road led onward, speaking of distant

habitations to be reached, the only touch of hope in the desolation of the moment.

Joss, gazing along this road, made an involuntary movement in sudden hatred of the outlook.

"To get away!" he cried. "I have n't got your soul."

"One wants an emergency one to-day," he was answered apologetically.

"Tell me, all the same," insisted Harvest, with an effort, "what there is about your lovers."

"Do you really want to know? Here 's the fly coming — your time is getting short."

"Go on."

"She lives in that farm, and he in the town. In body and spirit they are alien to these parts. It seems as if some one had brought her here from another planet, and the man had followed as a matter of course. They dance into verse after a single glance."

"I see," gibed Joss; "middle-class accidents — a village Hampden with his Maid of Athens. I prefer the two ends of the pole, the primitive animal, or the refinement of the civilized machine."

"If only you could see them," Alban cried, warming to his subject; "they're wonderful."

"In beauty and in love, I suppose; like the million after all. In what else are they wonderful?"

"You may ask. They see, they aspire — do the million do that? Their passion is in their very finger-tips — but their souls won't have it. With all their pulses beating, they've chained themselves to the stars."

Joss made a slight grimace.

"Don't tell me that you're slipping into the swaddling-clothes of the anti-socials. You know as well as I do how that will end. Illicit love has really had its turn in literature."

"There is no illicit love here."

"Not yet perhaps, but there's an end to be reached."

"I feel as if the ending were in my hands," said Alban, doggedly.

"Then, for God's sake, force on the old-fashioned denouement; burn their pamphlets while they wander at sunset, drag her rational garments — I'm sure she wears 'em — under the mill wheels, finish off your last canto in the old, old way, and

come back to me for a good drubbing. You must n't get decadent, old chap."

Joss spoke with an eloquence foreign to his slow tongue, but he had a quick wit, and the madness in the situation which excited his friend's fancy annoyed him.

But Alban, watching through the window, whispered excitedly —

"Here they are, down by the wicket. Come and look at them."

At the end of the little brown garden, undisturbed by the drenching rain, a man and a girl stood. They had stopped in their walk to watch the swollen river surging up almost to their feet. The girl had her face turned in profile. A soft green hunter's tam-o'-shanter was drawn over her brow, a long cloak covered her to her heels, but the line of neck and shoulder could be conceived as supremely graceful.

"She reminds me of La Mola," and Joss recalled in thought his one meeting with the Spanish dancer, when men talked of her as the splendour of the day; to his friend he remarked with purposeful consistency:

"She 's not my sort."

"And him — look at him, then."

The young man faced them. He wore a dark sailor's beret; his soft collar of blue linen was unharmed by the damp. His serge ready-made coat and cycling breeches could not detract for an instant from the athletic grace of his form. The fire in his eyes as he spoke to her, gave great vivacity to his face. Later, Harvest's glance wandered to the almost girlish clearness of complexion, to the soft moulding of his open lips.

"You say he is a printer in Corleston. There is no accounting for the soil where these things grow. If he had been a hunchback, a cripple, I might have believed in his pure soul; the existing combination is fantastic and unnatural."

"Ah, I thought I 'd make your prejudices tremble. Are n't they made for the thing that binds men low, and is n't it superb that they 're determined on angel wings here; does n't their mastery of themselves deserve to be immortalised?"

Joss laughed; recovering from his surprise he regained his rôle of denunciator.

"It's all very well; for the mere fact of their birth I allow they are remarkable to look at, but of the seriousness of their resolves, what makes you sure of it? Their telling you is no criterion."

"They've told me nothing, we greet each other sometimes, that's all. In search for sympathy they dare n't risk disappointment. They must give the Philistine the go-by. Their walls are not impregnable, alas!"

"Why should you be allowed to scale 'em, then?"

"Seriously, I'm brought into touch with them only in so far as anybody who, watching continually, weaves coherence from coincidence. They amaze me. Sometimes, in the forest, it's true I follow them, I hear them talking—"

"Look here, old chap," remarked Joss, "I can't say I like you as eavesdropper."

Alban reddened.

"I suppose you'd order me to play the schoolmaster and bully-rag them with good advice—tell them to have their banns read and give them a homily on family life."

"Well, what would happen to the world if we all fixed on the same resolve?"

"I think the world would look up a bit," he was answered.

Joss snorted.

"Your lovers are fit enough to marry in all conscience. Tell them to take their best chance. To-morrow — soon enough — they 'll grow old and bored, crying out for the waste of years. Besides, are n't they afraid of the parents — what the people about here will say?"

"What the people about here will say," Alban fixed his dreamy gaze on three fat geese in the meadow, the only sign of life, now that the lovers had moved away, "What people? The cow-herd? The farmer? They live in another sphere. The parents do not want the girl to marry — they are accustomed to young people 'walking out.' Mary is their pride — what questions should they ask? No, I wait for a larger test than what people will say."

"But you yourself," implored Joss.

"As a man I gauge them sanely, that's the worst of it, but as a poet, no. They summon to my imagination all those voices of mystery

which keep one alive. I think through them. Even if I fail to do them justice in verse, I shall reach nearer to my own possibilities."

There was a rumble in the farmyard, and the expected fly rattled in.

"You know," Joss threw a last word as he went out to it, "that those are the creatures who commit suicide hand in hand. Romeo and Juliet were well enough; they'd lived a little; but new fashions of the same thing are nasty."

"If they commit suicide," Alban followed with a laugh, "they will have pronounced their creed a failure. I shall return to London after the funeral, and spend my declining years between St. James's Street and Monte Carlo. Meanwhile you can tell Roscut and the rest of the chaps at White's that I'm travelling. If this production of mine fails I don't want them to think me a complete ass."

"Of course." Joss was relieved by this first sign of downright common-sense and conventionality in his friend. "But come back to us soon." He turned suddenly. "You can't think how I hate leaving you for my office."

"And I hate to lose you." Alban laid his hand affectionately in his friend's.

He stood for some time bareheaded between the milk-pans on the stone threshold of the house and watched the labouring of the fly up the muddy road. He almost wished that it contained a woman, for then there would have been that signal, the flutter of a handkerchief in the distance.

He turned into the kitchen at last and shut the door. He took the little book from his pocket, the pages covered with close writing, and read the glowing lines, the rapt imaginings which interest in these lovers had inspired. Yet loneliness and depression seemed suddenly to fall upon him. After all, what he had been telling Joss he intended to do, would he ever carry it out? Had he the genius to make a success in verse of what in all probability would be in fact a mere decay of enthusiasm and effort into failure. Six months these lovers had been walking on air, clinging to their unique resolve, to love as the angels love, without human desire or human ceremony. If they would only go away, if they would only

remove themselves from under his eyes, he could trust himself to invent, he would force himself to believe in their good faith to the end, and inscribe it in dazzling words. But while they stayed he must stay, he must watch them fulfil themselves, and soon — of that he was persuaded — they would have to fly to action of some sort, or know their ideal perishable.

Alban soliloquised standing by the hearth, but he was entirely restless. His cap and mackintosh hung upon a hook on the door; he took both down and put them on.

"Cæsar, how it rains!" he exclaimed again, "but I must go out and move along."

The garden was patched with a series of puddles. The heavy clay-soil clung to his boots as he walked and followed the way of the lovers. They were diminutive forms in the distance now. The path on the river-bank had long since been obliterated by the rising waters, and he ploughed through meadow-land saturated and disagreeable.

At the gate of the other farm stood Mary's father, a handsome, well-sized yeoman; within the house, bending to menial work with corpulent

content, Mary's mother. Alban approached the farmer.

"Terrible weather these days," he said.

"Ay, sir, it means mischief. Do you hear the roaring waters? I 'm afraid for my dam."

"Can you do nothing to strengthen it?" he said.

"Nought now — just trust in Providence for this night. The rain may cease — otherwise" — he checked himself, there was a look of fear in his eyes.

Alban swept the sky with a glance, the heavier clouds were sailing across, there was a general lifting upon the horizon.

"Ah," said he, "it will soon be over — a sunny evening." In spite of the farmer's fatalism his spirits rose.

But all through the day the rain still fell, the wind blew, sighing in the chimney, whistling through cracks and crevices, till towards night there was a lull. In his evening walk once more he met the lovers. When they came face to face with him their eyes were sparkling. She was looking at her man, but he was looking onwards. Alban looked at Jasper also.

"That mouth," he thought, "would be a painter's joy, but it is not what I want. He must square his jaw for his task. I declare I will speak to them of their purpose, test their mettle for once; it should send me to work till midnight."

"Good evening," he said; "we meet often."

"Yes, sir." Jasper raised his hat.

"You are lovers," Alban ventured boldly.

"Comrades."

The answer fell from her lips clearly.

"That means more, does n't it, between men and women? Will you tell me how much more — if you love?"

"Oh, we love."

They glanced at each other; a perfect comprehension adorned their smile.

"Do you know," said Alban, "that I have a confession to make. One day, down in the forest of Mall, where we find equal pleasure to stroll since the snow melted, I listened to your resolvings."

They flushed simultaneously, but holding each other's hands there crept into their attitude a certain pride.

"We have no secret."

"It should not be a secret," replied Alban gravely; "you would make a gospel — many want a new one."

"A new one? No, — to explain the truth of the old." Mary spoke again, and as if from a familiar book.

"But nature," Alban paused.

She looked at him with a certain dread.

"Don't remind us," she said; "all things can be subdued, even nature."

"Glorious! You who have so indubitably drunk from her breasts, how will she repay such traitors? How are you going to dissolve the trinity? Love without pain and joy is nothing."

"We have joy," she answered.

"We have not lost pain," said Jasper in a low voice.

Alban was struck by the inflection of anxiety. He turned upon the man, and for the fraction of a second seized from his handsome face and mentally engraved an expression of distraction. It passed, and the features resumed the exultant cast of a Standard Bearer, mating in glow with Mary's brilliant face.

Yet Alban repeated to himself, "Good, the action hastens;" then he turned, impelled to silent listening by the noise of the river.

"The waters are threatening, sir," — Jasper had the same impression — "God grant that the dam hold."

"With reverence I echo." Alban raised his hat. "This afternoon I saw one magpie."

"And we a butterfly," smiled Mary, innocent of the superstition attached to his remark.

"But that was fortune — it took you for the summer."

"We lost it," said Jasper. "Mary would have kept it warm among the window-pots, but it fluttered away somewhere."

"Kept warm among the window-pots, and it would not? After all, the butterfly would not, you will not, and I will not. We are in an insecure position all round. Do you think destiny when she catches us will send us to her truant-school? May she be merciful, so that you, I, and the butterfly may in durance vile come together again."

But they hardly followed his quaint philoso-

phies, their train of thought was in a measure simple, their road was broad and lightly peopled, they had no use for sophistries, for tangled byways; at least the girl had not, but Jasper had felt weaknesses which to her were unknown. Her lofty gaze was unclouded; in his, indicating trouble, were reserves. Reserves, inexplicable to himself, and hidden from her because of her perfect faith and innocence, and consequent perceptive limitations, but in their nature and origin clear as day to the penetration of the poet.

He watched them both intently. The young tree of knowledge, he knew, bent and swayed beneath the weight of this Adam and Eve of a new century; it had no root. Their fate was so unquestionable; yet he returned to his first curiosity at the moment of meeting. He could not let them escape yet. He lit a cigarette, still standing in their path.

"Then you are lovers," he reiterated; "comrades, rather. You have between you the utmost share of human beauty and human affection, that goes without saying. What then? You marry?"

"Marry? Why should we?" She flung the

ardent reply to him. "We cannot love more. We are going soon to the cities to work."

"Ah, to work."

"Truly; people must work who love as Jasper and I love."

It was quaint reasoning. "As Jasper and I love." The words, in their pathetic simplicity, haunted Alban. Women who spoke like that were bound to suffer, and men who know they are so loved must lose their strength. He knew already that the strength of the man was ebbing, that when he unharnessed from the stars she would have tragic disillusions; now she was perfect. How great, his heart declared, are innocent women. Then he reverted to her cry for work; what work could there be for souls like these in a world as it is? He dared not ask her to explain about work or great cities. He shrank from any hesitation of reply. Her certainty of statement held such charm. Shyly they stood before him, she still with her lover's long-fingered hand in her short strong one.

"And when you grow old?" asked Alban, involuntarily. The idea of this rose vividly.

"We shall die," she answered, "perhaps together."

She said it so gaily, so fearlessly, that the inquisitive faded from Alban's intention; he relinquished enquiry altogether. Why should he interrogate them as to their conception of worlds, of the propagation of the species, of race instinct? What had they in common with such things? His eyes were hot with sudden tears. He demanded that this picture should fade even now; the colours were too delicate to stand another touch from the brush of time; the slightest turn of fortune, and it would become a daub.

He moved from them to hide his emotion.

"Good night," he said, turning on his heel. "Since we have been talking the sun has deigned to set; it has thrown a bar of gold into the horrible greyness. If my wishes could make the sun rise next to continued happiness and unfaltering endeavour for you, you have those wishes. I am here, you know, hiring this farm, and living without much purpose. We may meet again—good night."

He went back to his work, writing by candle-

light late. His thoughts tumbled upon paper in a sudden frenzy of inspiration; with the roar of the river in his ears, he wrote as if against time, like a man with a last chance.

"It reads more like an elegy than anything else," he said to himself, moving up the creaking stairs at midnight to bed.

Two hours later he was awakened by the hurry and loud voice of a bearer of bad news.

"What is it?" he said, sleepily.

"The dam's burst — that's what 't is. Farmer 'Olroyd's farm's swept off; the tide's turrible." The ploughman stood there gasping, his ill-shapen hat still on his head, and the water dripping down the edge of his corduroy trousers over his clogs to the floor.

Alban, to check loquacity, flung himself from the bed, and into his clothes.

"I 'm coming," he said.

All his manhood was aroused to excitement by this crisis. He felt with strong dramatic instinct that an hour pregnant with incident was dawning for him, that analytical thought would be swept away by sound action. The news was not unex-

pected. The possibility of such a fate had hung before many during the interminable rainfall, only luck more often than not saved situations ripe for disaster, but not this time. That the catastrophe should have come with malice in the dead of night was to him of small moment, so long as he could seize, from personal contact with it, fresh experience. There would be a pale moon between the angry clouds to light the anxious scene. He left the slow-tongued labourer unquestioned, and they went out.

As he had guessed, there was a watery moon and a cessation of the rain.

As far as eye could reach, one tremendous sheet of water swept on its course; not placidly, as floods sweep over fields, but pouring onwards with wrathful violence, like a captured sea released. The district had always seemed lonely, but as vultures to carrion or flies to flowers, out of nowhere apparently, drawn irresistibly by the fast-travelling news of disaster, a crowd had gathered.

A crowd, not merely the impotent watchers of the destruction of wood and stone, of the sweep-

ing away of human handiwork by the angry forces of nature, but a whispering, anxious crowd, moving with varying gestures, as if it held knowledge of grave importance.

"Are all safe?" asked Alban of the man nearest him.

"The boat carried the farmer and his wife and the farm girls, but the daughter would not come. She was waiting for some one, she said; you can see her yet."

And truly upon the shapeless accumulations round the roof that still showed above the waters, there was evidently a figure.

"What did she wait for?"

"For her lover, some say — Jasper Stansted — fool's play, I call it," his informant grunted.

"But he's come, he's fetching her — surely he has gone to the rescue?"

Alban's voice was eager, his heart beat violently. Fierce desire for physical effort in this danger seized him. By heavens, if her lover did not save her soon, at any risk, he must. What were these people thinking of?

His eyes had grown accustomed to the dim light,

to the whiteness of the faces in it, to the ugly things that swept by him in curls of foam and spume — dead horses and calves amidst the beams of wood, and pans and troughs and garden-rails all sliding on too fast in a surging torrent for even the nimblest hand to clutch. Heavens, it might be her body soon, for on this cold night her strength could not last forever: she must be reached quickly and brought to safety. There should not be much difficulty in it. Where was Jasper? Struggling somewhere, probably, to approach his love.

"The boat! Where 's that boat?" And there came to his enquiry, almost at his elbow, a man's sobbing answer.

"The boat, they can't reach her with the boat."

"Then how?"

"By swimming — there 's a small channel left. A rope from the boat and a strong swimmer could do it, they tell me."

"And you, Jasper Stansted?"

"I cannot swim," he groaned, and stretched out his arms across the water.

A curious contempt for the man possessed Alban for a period. Again he was the dissector.

He could have written fine lines as he inflicted his torture.

"But with the boat you could get near, quite near, indeed. You could step across the rubbish with the help of the rope; there is at least a chance — the boatman may have been deceived."

Jasper was crying like a child.

"It 's no use, but I want her! My God, I want her. She must live — she 's got to live," he besought; "save her for me!"

"Ah, you would have been greater if you had died — both of you," Alban answered between his teeth.

But instantly his natural manliness reasserted itself, and drove his meaner genius to the background.

"Listen," he went on, feeling that he was judging hardly, but prompted by a sudden desire to rid himself of the thing that had failed him, "I have been waiting long to see the meaning of your dream: now I don't mind risking my life to celebrate your awakening. I said I 'd immortalise you. How can I? You 're like all the rest, crushed at the first test."

And he swung round on his heel.

"Bring that boat here," he cried, "and be quick about it."

The heavy punt, too full already of helpers, came on slowly and nearer to him.

"Get out of that, we don't want overloading; one man — the best rower and the coolest head — a coil of rope — that 's well."

Jasper crept after him with grateful words. But Alban's voice sounded to him above the roar of waters.

"Don't speak, don't say anything to me now, I can't listen to you, but if I bring her back, swear that you take her, as a man must take a woman who loves him. There is nothing worth exchanging for such love." It puzzled him, as he said the words, that his inexperience could find such positive assurance in them. Yet he cried out again with stronger insistence. "Swear that you will marry her, work for her, go down to a future death by her, even as you wish to live by her now — swear."

Jasper echoed readily.

"I swear — how gladly I swear."

Then hearing the tone of relief, the tone

without hesitation, eager for any oath that might bring comfort, Alban laughed out, and taking his little book from his pocket he flung it into the stream.

"Now," he said, "shove off."

He took the second pair of oars. He swung steadily against the strong waters till the sweat poured down, the eyes of all the crowd upon him.

His mind alternated between two thoughts; the moment just passed with the man, the moment that was to come with the woman: that he dreaded. Mary was so strong. He felt that she would have no gladness, rather misery, in the assurance of the compact; if she believed his disclosure, which was unlikely, she might then and there fling herself into the water, preferring to sacrifice herself to the nature she defied, rather than yield to it. It would be better to wait till he had gathered her to safety before he told her — much better, he decided. How good that this struggle for her life should be allowed him, and yet to what life would he return her. It was absurd; but for the moment he wished himself

the lover. Jasper would have no power to explain to her brave soul the true union of flesh and spirit; life with him would but accentuate the cleavage. But at this moment the blood coursed through his veins with an exultation which no unrest, no scruples or fear could overpower. Quite simply and naturally, without a suspicion of undue pride, he felt that he had entered the lists of everyday heroism, and, however covetous his imagination for experience, he knew no future moment could surpass in satisfaction the action of the present.

He rowed on silently with his companion. The water, with dark objects floating here and there upon it, swirled round the boat; the line of people on the banks had grown quite distant; a little further only, and their goal!

There was no doubt about it, the boat could not advance to within a hundred yards of the roof, the lumber sweeping about in the eddies threatened now to swamp it. The two rowers rested on their oars and consulted. Mary could be seen quite plainly; she was crouching by the chimney, the water rising round her feet. Alban

waved to her, and she answered him, but with a halting movement, as if, as she waved, she wondered who could be waving to her, and hoped against hope.

He surveyed the position quickly.

"I see a quiet channel there. Tie this rope firmly round my waist," he directed, twisting it as he spoke. "Can't you make a double knot, man; that's a clumsy business, but I dare say it will hold. Now pay it out as I jump in. With the turns, I reckon the channel a hundred and twenty yards. I leave you my coat. Are you sure you can steady the boat here?"

"Yes, sir."

Alban plunged overboard, and struck out boldly. He needed caution and confidence, but the expert swimming of school-days stood him in good stead. He smiled as he moved, and his teeth gleamed above the parting water. Everything round him loomed so largely in the imperfect light.

"Alban among the icebergs," he said; "verily this water is as cold as the Arctic sea. If only Joss could see me now!"

Through all the intricacies of the stream he reached her at last, and, dragging himself, dripping, shivering, to her level, he held out his hand.

"I 've come to fetch you."

"Where is Jasper?" In her tone there was a whole world of disappointment.

"You see," he replied quizzically, "Jasper can't swim."

"But he might have come," she insisted illogically.

"Ah," Alban retorted in a low voice, "so I said; you were ready, were n't you?—almost waiting to die together? Is n't that so?"

"Yes," she answered eagerly. "I suppose I could have got away before. I did n't realise the danger, and when I did realise it, I thought he 'd come either for life or death—it did n't matter which."

Alban's teeth chattered, he felt a numbness of spirit as she explained, which exceeded the coldness of his body.

"Jasper wants you to live," was all he said; "you must trust yourself to me. Are you coming?"

"I suppose so."

She moved reluctantly. In her isolation there had been no fright; her world was of dreams; this terrible flood seemed almost to belong to the strenuousness of her ideals, and found its place quite naturally in them.

"You are kind," she said at last, as if her gratitude had been an afterthought and she was ashamed.

"See," he ordered, "put your arms round my neck quite lightly, thus. We are in no danger really; I will carry you on my back. Don't be frightened at the coldness of the water, the boat is close."

She obeyed. As she clung to him, Alban turned once and looked into her face closely, so that he might even distinguish its expression in the dim light. It was a beautiful face, round which the long hair hung loosened and rippling over the lines of the neck; her brow, wide, serene, seemed like a blank page for tragedy's imprint, her eyes were bright, but they looked away, as she mechanically trusted herself to her preserver —away into the distance where she knew Jasper

must be standing. Then feeling the nearness of Alban's gaze, she recollected herself, bent her head and kissed him on the hand.

"Do you know," she said, "foolish as I must seem, I believe you understand."

"Yes," he said, "I understand, God knows," and he slipped into the water with her.

He swam a few long strokes, then he set his teeth, for he knew the rope had loosened from its knot, and the slightest catch or strain would free it altogether. He swam on the faster, for, among the timber and branches that impeded the way, it would go. The little hands clung to him firmly, yet as loosely as possible; there was no fear in her grasp. Yet, to him, delicate and untrained, the weight was great, and the cold biting. He breathed heavily, and the water now and then lapped into his nostrils, for a slight breeze had risen again after the calm into which the day's gale had fallen. The shape of the boat he saw already, but it seemed to have dropped a little on the waters — to be farther than when he started. Once round the corner of this pile, the current would serve his purpose, and carry them quickly.

His eyeballs started uncomfortably, his breath whistled in his throat, but they approached safety, and he focussed every thought upon this for her sake; it gave him forced strength. Already they were nearer; a few strokes more — nearer still. The buzzing in his head was frightful. His thoughts began to play about his compact with Jasper, about the effect of the new order upon the girl. Then the loosened rope slipped off him. For the first time his nerve faltered: he saw the moving oars, as the rower kept the boat upstream, he heard now the creaking in the rowlocks. The boat was almost over them; then he threw up his arms.

"Take her," he gasped, hoarsely, "take her — take her."

In an instant the burden was released from his shoulder; even in the agony of his cramp he knew she was safe; but they missed his hand as the stream carried him on. He struggled a little, feeling the uselessness of it.

"A queer immortality, this," he cried out, as the waters stole his breath and sucked him down.

THE GREAT GOD CHANCE

"The little Black Rose shall be red at last;
What made it black but the March wind dry?"

FTER all," she said to herself, "if I 'd only had a chance." She meditated, leaning over the balcony, above the street. A strolling player, glancing up at her beauty, checked his wanderings, and, to his guitar, sang, in a full tenor voice:

"Ninon, Ninon, que fais-tu de la vie?"

Then his dark eyes sparkled. She threw francs to him lightly, almost as one might blow kisses.

But this passing music had fired reflection. It flamed in her almost to despair. She felt suddenly old, and looked the more youthful. The life she had lived, all marked and blurred, moved through her memory till the tears welled.

"It would have been different if I 'd had a chance," she repeated, and went, sighing, into her shuttered room.

The clock had just struck two. A light breeze stirred the tall poplars in the park of this fashionable French watering-place. In the shade the people strolled, or sat inertly upon yellow metal

chairs, as if the mineral waters had dissolved even their commercial importance in the world. A blare of trumpets floated from the pavilion.

She came on to the balcony again, noting all the scene, but yawning still from her midday sleep. The serenader had passed to other windows. He left her dissatisfied. She tried to convince herself that a week of absolute solitude had brought salvation to body and spirit, but all the time knew well that she had reached a stage of perilous boredom.

"Why is my life to be continual tumult?" she murmured. "A parson's wife — six children — a country vicarage — my real vocation missed." This was her avowed mental attitude, but a buzzing sprite in the background of thought sang to another tune. "The devil was sick, the devil a saint would be, The devil got well . . ." Then came a moment of complete absorption; it thrust all musing into space. The omnibus from the station rattled up to the hotel; she saw that an Englishman's valet and an Englishman's luggage were in possession.

This was obvious. The Saratoga trunk, the

Belgian's bag, the French paper box, had passed or stopped a score of times. But the wholesome leather portmanteaux, with their green bands, the block letters, "J. C.," the crocodile-skin dressing-case, the clean-shaven, straight-cut servant giving orders to the French waiter like a general on a battlefield — about these there could be no mistake.

A compatriot at last! How she had hated the French crowd hanging around everywhere. The narrow-brimmed straw hats, the clipped beards, the fluttering bow-ties, the exaggeration of courtesy, or oftener the insolent *cap-à-pied* stares — all were odious. She was a woman alone, it was true; but she wore no paint as their women alone did, and her eyes flashed a bold disdain of all petty amenities. What reason had she given them to doubt her respectability? With each draught of tepid water at the fountain she had felt herself sucking in a fierce virtue. Then alone in her little room, banked with roses and cornflowers she would laugh till the tears came at the recollection of her march of defiance, of the imperious tilt of her head as she strode through

gaping ranks in the public gardens, like a goddess surprised.

"If they only knew about me really," she laughed again, and as suddenly grew grave. The blood had rushed into her cheeks from pleasurable anticipation at the arrival of an Englishman; now with self-reproach as she watched the road she cried out to herself, "Douchka, you speak to no man while you are here."

After all, that was a definite determination she had arrived at. She was starting a new life. She had her studio and the talent to work in it when she returned from this cure: what need to get mixed up with other people's interests? She had left Claud six months ago and in result had won back all her self-respect, all her natural purity of mind. She was free to touch the best things with clean hands, for she had been true to herself at a cost that atoned in her estimate for the things over and done with.

People had known about it — oh, yes, and they would remember too — that was part of the penalty — but she would live it down — she would— Her thought trailed off, a smile stole over her

mobile face; the Englishman was swinging down the road.

He wore a straw hat set at a slight angle, he looked like a soldier without the proverbial moustache. His face was distinctly attractive, possibly handsome, he was tall and wore the right clothes.

Then he ran up the steps of the hotel and she put her hands to her eyes with an involuntary movement.

"I don't want to see him closer." Her heart needed the assurance.

Later she went out wearing on her glinting hair a muslin bonnet wreathed round with marguerites, and holding up soft skirts from the dust. The hall was empty; but a blue telegram in the rack bore the address — "Julian Carrender." "Why don't they give it to him," she considered; "he sleeps undoubtedly," and she passed down the passage on tiptoe.

That afternoon she loitered under the arcade and among the shops. She turned corners with trepidation and avoided the Casino, dawdling eventually to the river where only patient fishers stood and dabbled long lines to wary fish, or

washerwomen scrubbed clothes and laid them in crumpled heaps upon the bank to dry. Here at any rate she would not meet him face to face; even with this belief she went expectantly.

From the top of the acacia avenue that flanked the main promenade, she could see the portico of the hotel. As she turned homewards later she looked towards it; the Englishman was coming down the steps, quickly, as if he had an object in view.

The impulse to approach him was irresistible. Douchka continued her path, but without looking to right or left he crossed it. She saw him pass the obsequious garçon at the restaurant who had run forward expecting an order, and enter the Casino as if it were familiar ground. Evidently he had been here before. It was absurd to imagine that he sought the reading-room; the latest papers from England must be in his pocket, and in his hotel apartments, ink and pens to spare. Perhaps he had friends to meet him in the Casino; perhaps — she drew her breath sharply as the notion came — perhaps he was a gambler.

For her, gambling had no attraction. Those who sat all day and night in a stuffy atmosphere staking silver pieces cautiously on toy horses whirling round, had ever seemed to her idlers and fools. Surely Mr. Carrender — she played with his name — could not wish to mingle, even as a student of human nature, with that rabble of most hideous and untidy composition. Then she remembered the baccarat rooms, and, unquestioned by the attendant at the desk, she passed full of curiosity between the glass doors that led to them.

The little tables in the corner of the large gilded hall were hemmed in by men and women upon whose faces even at this early hour the garish electric light cast a cruel illumination.

Eyes heavily shadowed were set upon the vagaries of the cards; hands displaying flashing rings as if to divert attention from broken nails and sometimes twisted finger-tips, fidgeted continually with the counters on the green cloth, or twitched aimlessly.

It was such a silent game this — one could hear a pin drop. Douchka pushed in beside the

man who held the bank. The fixed eyes, the restless hands, the complete stillness, these things interested her, until she saw Carrender.

For lack of a seat he stood; he had been so short a time at the table that the expression of indifference with which he had approached the players had not faded before the tense look of the habitual gambler quite possessed him. But Douchka saw the fading, saw the narrowing of the lips, the droop of the brow, the shifting movement of the eyelids, the gradual disappearance of the boyish candour which had been there at her first glance.

She grew white to the lips as she realised what he was. "My chance," she said to herself, and for half an hour she waited, watching him from the other side of the table. In that time he won continually; then, as if bored by such persistent luck, he turned half away, looked over his shoulder and encountered her gaze.

They spoke in that look to each other on the instant. Her soul leaped out between her lashes imploringly; he almost divined her words, for he reddened to the roots of his hair and sauntered

presently round to where she stood. For some minutes elbow to elbow they watched the game.

"You don't like gambling," he said to her at last in English.

"No," she answered at once, pleased that he had not mistaken her nationality.

A cadaverous-looking Belgian sitting below them stared up as they spoke. He was accustomed to quick recognitions in this room; to sudden consultations as to the play. As they turned and walked out together, he resumed his game with a significant shrug.

In the vestibule of the Casino Julien Carrender continued talking.

"It is ridiculous," he observed with a laugh, "but you made me feel ashamed of myself, you looked so like my mother — no," he added as she smiled deprecatingly, "you know what I mean — the reproach in your eyes. I'm a hardened sinner in most things, but I would n't have spoken to you otherwise, — you feel that, don't you? I seemed to owe you an apology."

"Why an apology?" she asked moving slowly into the garden.

He was embarrassed. He wanted to go on talking to her, but he felt that his excuses to draw her into closer personal relation to himself were feeble.

"Oh, I don't know," he said quickly.

But she helped him out.

"Are you a gambler?" she asked, throwing a tone of commiseration into her voice.

In sheer self-defence at her pity, he forced himself to speak lightly.

"A gambler? Of course I 'm one. Do you think that so very dreadful?"

"I hope you 're fortunate," she said gravely; "most gamblers I have known suffered from despair — but you — you —?" She broke off, afraid to continue.

He stood still in her path; he threw reserve to the winds.

"Most gamblers that you know suffer from despair, do they," he repeated. "Do you wonder? It 's like poison in one's veins, the game. I 've tried to cut it at home — in India I nearly got chucked out all round. After the row, my nerves went to pieces, and the doctors told me to

drink waters. I looked up the places and I came here, because they said that one could play all day and all night, and Englishmen were scarce. This year I have come again. Now you see that I 'm a coward into the bargain."

She trembled at this unexpected revelation of a twin life. Her own complicated weakness and suffering matched his, she would have given anything to confess it. Instead, she drew herself up with the air of a queen. She pursed her red lips.

"If one starts to go down hill" — she began.

He stopped his ears with a frown.

"Don't lecture me," he said, "or you 'll make me wish I had cut my tongue out rather than talk to you. After all, you have only just begun life — you 've probably got everything guarded for you. That is what I guess by your face; it 's pure and compassionate enough. I must seem such a beast to you."

He spoke quickly, with great simplicity, and in a moment of tumultuous feeling for them both she dared not trust herself to reply.

The waiter on the doorstep of the hotel

watched them returning. His lymphatic body clothed a hopeful soul.

"It would be good," he considered, "that milord and madame were acquainted." These English people had stupid ways — they avoided table d'hôte, they asked to dine in their salon — sapristi! perhaps the two would dine together now, so much the better.

About this, however, he made a faulty calculation. Not for several days did Douchka meet Julian Carrender again. They touched then on the weather from neutral ground, and passed on, till one afternoon he sent up to ask if she would drive with him.

"The days are so long," he said, looking at her with admiration as she came down to him, a vision in blue muslin, "I want to talk to you about this wicked world. I 'm always thinking about your eyes — the way they look at things," the occasion seemed to warrant the frankness of the remark.

She laughed and they drove away happily into the sunny French country.

Since the day they met she evaded difficulty

by closing every talk with a hurried formality. She tortured herself in the intervals with doubts and fancies, sinking at one moment into shame at the hypocrisy of the virtuous airs she assumed with him, then rising to glad heights in the knowledge that he believed in her.

"He thinks my face pure" — she mocked to herself in the glass — "why are men blind?"

In the morning, going to the spring, he would swing out earlier than she could start, and if she appeared on the balcony he would bow with a bright smile. It seemed a sort of atonement for the hours which he spent later in the Casino; there she never attempted to follow him again. He was grateful, as he played, that she was absent, that he did not see her about the hotel when he turned in late to bed, almost always a loser, yet craving, altogether ashamed, for the morrow's chances.

But her very avoidance of his occupation, gave her fuller empire over his imagination. To-day he asked her to drive, for he felt that at any cost he must see her, and when she came readily he felt keen pleasure.

They drove on, talking gaily.

"Are n't you bored here?" he asked her. "Have n't any of your people come out?"

"What people?" she answered innocently.

"Your husband, I suppose, and all the rest of them?"

"My husband, and all the rest of them," she evaded; "no, I am a very independent sort of person."

"I 'm sure you are, but they ought n't to leave you alone. I should n't," he went on eagerly, "if I were married to you."

She cast her eyes upon an old peasant woman bending over a strawberry plot. At this instant she wished she could change places with her.

"You would n't?" she said at last. "It 's a bore not to be left alone," and her tone rang coldly to him.

"Now you think me cheeky, Mrs. Waring — you see I know your name — Madame Waring, said the waiter to my British questioning."

She laughed out now.

"When people are very solitary what foolish

things they will take up. Do you ask questions about all the people you see in the Casino?"

She was instantly sorry that she had resorted to badinage, for he became quickly abashed.

"Why should I ask questions about these brutes? You know you 're not in the least like any one else here."

"Then I 'm flattered," she touched his arm apologetically. After this they were silent for a little. The driver explained to them points of view as the loosely reined horses clattered along the dusty road. There was a great satisfaction in the present, she felt — in the verdure of the woods, in the green hills that surrounded them, in the blueness of the distant mountains in the centre of France. A charm even in the smocked peasants who, with pathetic prudence, were tying roses into nosegays, the asparagus into bundles, and gathering fruit into baskets for the rich ones of their land.

They reached presently the restaurant at the highest point of the district, a little house under leafy chestnuts. There among the roses and Spanish lilacs that almost embowered the chairs

on which they sat, on the outskirts of a far-spreading vineyard, they drank coffee and fenced with a repartee as brilliant as the butterflies that fluttered upon the flowers.

Julian Carrender was fascinated by this woman who with perfect frankness of manner told him so much and yet so little; who eluded him, adopting on the one hand the familiarity of a mother, on the other hand the witchery of a coquette, and who had not yet betrayed her Christian name or told him if she were a wife or widow.

After all, he did not really wish to question her. Her uncommon beauty, her wit, her delightful talk, the more unrestrained from the freedom of their surroundings in the perfect setting of this summer afternoon, all gave him a knowledge of her character that no other circumstances in the world could have allowed. He grew to know her nature rather than her history — an infinitely preferable affair he reckoned. She was at her best because he believed her the best, and showed this in every look and gesture.

She grew forgetful of the past, unmindful of her own restrictions. "It is my chance," she

told herself, tossing her head back in the bright sunshine, "my chance to save him." And he, thinking her altogether adorable, lowered his voice to a great gentleness as, driving back together in the dusk, they talked of simple matters. That night he did not go to the Casino, but fell asleep reading a book which she had lent him.

The next morning he sent to ask for her, but she had gone away, the message came back, until the evening. Later, a motor-car steamed up to the hotel and he was hailed by a friend whose unexpected arrival diverted his thoughts a little and kept him again from the gaming tables.

"I have come for a few hours from Paris," said Max Foster.

As Foster was departing towards evening, Douchka returned from her expedition to the neighbouring convent — a teacher of her childhood was there, she had explained to Julian the previous day. Both the men saw Douchka, but she only saw her friend standing beside the car; she smiled and waved gaily as she passed.

"Hullo, Julian," remarked Foster, noticing Carrender's flushed face, "you 're in luck here."

"Why?"

"That woman," and Foster, turning his head, looked after the carriage as she drove on.

"Do you know her?" said the other.

"Why, of course, I know her—Douchka Waring—and, by Jove! as pretty as ever. A chance, *mon cher;* but you gamblers are such woman haters! She left Claud Sanders six months ago for a path of virtue. She lived with him for four years."

Julian Carrender, like a true gambler, assumed an indifference to all the events of life. Unexpected consolations or crashes had never yet won from him a manifestation of particular surprise or dismay. The bitter in his career he took with a certain bravado which masked a real courage, for he was highly strung, and sensitive to a degree, and he lived his life as it were on edge.

But Max Foster's statement, hurled at him breezily, to an accompaniment of whirring motor-car machinery, left him cold at heart.

For quite two minutes after the cloud of dust had shadowed his friend's farewell he stood still upon the road. He did not feel exactly disillu-

sioned, but brought to a complete *volte-face*, in his puzzling about the woman he most undoubtedly loved. It was useless to juggle with phrases now, to assure himself that Douchka was but the plaything of circumstance. She was a woman who, once known, could not be forgotten. In the gallery of his experience she was a masterpiece among counterfeits; she was unlike any woman he had ever met.

"Douchka Waring lived with Claud Sanders for four years" — the sentence haunted his mind. He had heard of Sanders, that was enough. That it should have been thus was in a measure unbelievable, yet possible. The odd part of it was, that, even so, the character of his feelings about her had not changed; they seemed to be established — to stand the push of contingency; his ideas merely re-sorted themselves, and into his calculations there crept a new excitement.

Hitherto he had chafed that she seemed immeasurably removed from him. In spite of other wishes, he had supposed her married — unveiling to him for a little, from sheer exuberance of youth

in dull surroundings, the workings of her mind as pastime. This to be recollected under home skies with a laugh, and "Do you remember, Mr. Carrender?" — a thread in the woof of some commonplace conversation in all the domestic restraint of her castle terrace, to show that once — how long ago! — they had been intimate. Now the oppression of this fear had faded, giving place to other nameless fears.

Yet, in spite of all fears, she was fair game at last; the luck had turned, the trump-cards were not all hers. Carrender was never more a gambler than at this moment. Without her knowledge he had been suddenly shown her hand, could guess at every motive, would almost be able to read each thought, and, by heaven, she should prove herself! That was what he insisted — on that he would stake all — to prove herself true in spite of everything. He said this to himself, remembering her clear eyes; but imagining further, and hating himself the while, if she were wrong he must leave her before he could ever allow the wrongness to himself. She should not suffer too much. It was strange, all things

considered, that he felt her unquestionably capable of deep suffering.

Then, with a certain nervousness, he went back to dine with her.

Afterwards, they sat together on the terrace of the Casino.

The soft blue twilight, pierced by stars, spread over them.

She lit a cigarette from his shyly.

"Do you think people about here will think it fast of me to smoke?" she said, and he reassured her, marvelling at her complexity. She was supremely happy — this he guessed. He could not mistake the slight tremor of her hand in his when they met. She was glad to be with him.

She told him of her day's excursion, and touched lightly on her girlhood at the convent at Amiens, where she had first met her friend.

She could be remarkably intelligent when she liked. She looked out on *le monde où l'on s'ennuie*, and gauged it with quick precision. That was part of her charm; the unusual sense of proportion for a woman in her estimate of things; her sparkling appreciation of uncommon situations.

Carrender drifted into the current of her talk. In answer to his enquiry, "Why did you receive that pretty name — Douchka? You know what it means?" she blushed: "My father thought it the sweetest word in Russia." She told him then of her birth in that country, and rattled off quaint descriptions of baby-recollections of the great Emperor — of his Cossack guard — of the strange Moscow Kremlin. She forced him into a hot discussion regarding the condition of the peasantry; of limited versus absolute monarchy, into laughing acquiescence in the impossibility of a republic. "See these people," she wound up, waving her hand towards the pink chestnut trees, and including in the gesture the over-dressed women loitering beneath the electric lamps, and the fat respectabilities of French middle class, who crowded them uncomfortably upon the terrace — "what an outcome!" And he agreed with her sweeping conclusions, as he would have agreed to anything.

"You are charming," he burst out, "there is nothing you describe that one cannot understand or picture vividly."

"So much perplexes me as I say it," she replied, a little wearily.

"Why?" he asked, touched to the quick by the sudden sadness in her eyes. He had a great desire that she would hold out her arms to him and tell him the truth of her life. She looked so beautiful amidst all the common types that surrounded them. But as he pressed her, she withdrew her glance from his, feeling how dangerous the descent to personalities from the safe level of general topics.

"The music is playing all the time," she said, "we should not talk too much."

"You are so much more interesting than the Walkürie," he insisted, as the violins swept the marvellous phrases into the still air. But she did not answer him. A great anxiety began to creep over her.

How necessary this man was becoming to her existence, she wanted always to talk to him, to hear him talk! Their minds seemed to work so much in unison that every minute was joyful. The hours spent away from him had been emptied of all profit. She knew that she interested

him as she had wished to do — she was drawing him thus away from the tables — that was all as it should be. Yet, at this moment, she grew afraid: afraid of such intimate intercourse and of all that it might ultimately mean. He thought her married, and very much alone; this she held for granted, but he was such a gentleman, that of her solitude and familiarity he had taken no advantage. Still, things could not go on like this forever.

"What are you thinking of?" he said.

An answer was needed, and she invented one.

"I am wondering when you will go to the baccarat room to-night."

He knew that she replied at random, but he brought another question forward.

"Don't you want me to go?"

"No, oh, no."

"Then keep me here."

"All night?" she bantered. "What about Monsieur le Docteur and chills?"

"Not all night — always," his voice caressed her.

"Ah, but I have only twelve days and six

hours left of my retreat here — 'always' is a big word to use for that."

"And afterwards?"

She tore in pieces between her nervous fingers the chestnut blooms that had fluttered to her lap, yet she spoke gaily.

"Afterwards? I shall return to England, and you will go to Monte Carlo, where they gamble — always."

He felt a little ashamed of himself, now that she had got the best of this small passage of arms. He had no right to drive her into a corner. She had given him no real encouragement; he was taking a mean advantage of what he knew, and showing himself unworthy of her simple confidences. In spite of her complete self-command, he perceived uneasiness in her expression. But he ventured one more word; he felt at the moment the imperative need to speak it stronger than his compunction.

"I don't ask it now — but some day — any day you choose — will you tell me about yourself?"

"What about myself?"

"The tragedies, the comedies, the things in you, about you, that make me care for you so much."

He had not meant to go so far, he had startled her. She sprang up with almost a cry — the men smoking with a woman, under the palm, in the corner, looked at them with interest.

"There is nothing to tell," she said with quivering lips, forcing back her tears, "nothing that I can tell you, except that I am a fool playing with fire — that you 've known all along — let 's go home."

He drew her cloak round her as closely as he dared; with a whole world of contrition in his voice he said, —

"My dear, you must forgive me — are n't you a little proud, all the same, at having made an out-and-out gambler in love? I offered you an acknowledgment, not an insult."

She seemed to be grateful for this touch of humour and courtliness in his apology. It reassured her as to her position in his estimation — conscience had made her too great a coward about that. In silence she took his arm, and smiled

good night when he left her at the door of the hotel.

But once in her room she was bowed with miserable sobs. Julian had driven the infinite delight of their relationship by a few simple words into a hopeless impasse. She had stilled self-reproach long ago with the sophism that he was the shipwrecked, she the rescuer. Now she had to face the truth, the uncompromising knowledge that all the time he had been merely the lover to deceive, and indeed deceived continually, when he of all men deserved the truth.

In spite of every temptation to be frivolous, what had he been but guarded in his talk, almost reverent in his respect and above all tender beyond measure in the flashes of affection which she had roused him to display? She had influenced him simply because he had believed her good, and "I 'm bad, bad, bad," she repeated, beating her little fist upon the cushion of her chair. Oh, the perplexity, the contradiction of it all! Even now her first thought was the grief that no longer could she keep him from gambling, no longer urge him to be worthy of himself. He was so

worth saving that she would gladly have sacrificed every claim that her adoration might have begged of him for herself, if only he could gain.

Now that he had spoken, however, there was an end to everything. She must go away. In spite of his avowal he believed her pure. That she was sure of: if ever he learnt what she was, the effect would be too awful to contemplate. The driving him back into depths of cynicism, of abandonment to his besetting sin. By leaving now she could at least bequeath him ideals. To go might be to disappoint him, to stay would be to degrade him. She had not the courage to continue playing a part. To do him the best turn she could, was to go. She stood up smoothing her tumbled hair and glanced vaguely at the clock, the hands of which pointed to half-past ten.

She was convinced, with a certain triumph in the conviction, that to-night Julian would not gamble.

She did not guess that he paced the gardens still, and for an hour more, stirred by the excitement of his own hurried action. He regretted

nothing, but wondered when the stress of events would make her bold enough to trust him. He forgot that he was a gambler of uncertain fortune in the longing he had to hold her for self-preservation in his arms — to make her, in spite of everything, his wife. This desire had grown in him with gathering force during the hours they had spent together this evening. "She is the only woman," he argued simply, — "be her past what it may — who can in the future make me a man."

Douchka heard the rumbling of the great doors of the theatre as they closed them, the patter of the feet of the returning pleasure-seekers. She remembered in after years the nature of these sounds so vividly — her inability on the instant to bring her mind to a great decision — the silly way in which trifles diverted her from her purpose.

At last she took down the time-table, and found a train to Paris starting at seven in the morning. She rang then for the sleepy waiter, told him her intention, asked for the bill and wrote the usual cheque, all quite mechanically.

Should she leave a letter for Julian, that was

the crucial question? But what to say — fresh lies? Fresh excuses? Better silence. What right had she to assume that the interest expressed on a sentimental evening would follow her even into the next morning. An acquaintanceship of ten days must not be taxed too highly. A week of fortuitous circumstances for man and woman need hardly breed a lifelong devotion. Julian Carrender for a year or two would probably think of her kindly, not as the guardian angel which she had constituted herself. That would be absurd. For a little he might be perplexed about her disappearance, but men had so much less curiosity than women. He would chafe at first in the tedium of his exile; he might play a little more from boredom — she shuddered as she reached this thought, but continued building the card-house of her self-persuasion. After all, he had been between the devil and the deep sea. She, by her departure, withdrew the devil; destiny might even rescue him from the deep sea. It was no business of hers. So she reasoned — then came a rush of tears.

In the early morning she packed her bag hur-

riedly, dreading a last look round the room. Only the drooping roses in the vase, the torn papers in the grate showed her recent habitation.

At the appointed time she drove to the station and caught her train; it started indeed too late for her burning desire to be away.

The waiter, usually loquacious, kept back on this occasion all information, waiting for Monsieur's questioning. Julian Carrender refrained from this for some hours.

Then over the widespread sheets of "Le Figaro," he asked nonchalantly:

"Has Madame breakfasted?"

"Madame has gone," replied Pierre, setting a dish of strawberries triumphantly upon the table.

"Gone?" the newspaper rustled.

Pierre handed the *hors-d' œuvres.*

"Yes, Madame does not come back — she had the short cure — she goes to Paris."

"Paris?" echoed Julian, turning white.

"Paris," echoed his informant again — "but she does not leave the address of her hotel" — and he went out of the room, for Monsieur disliked too much attention.

"Gone," exclaimed Julian, starting to his feet as the door closed, — "without a word. So that's the end of it all. She could n't see it out, poor little thing. What a fool I have been. It's worse than I thought. My God," he added hoarsely, "how much worse!"

To Douchka driving through the streets in her prettiest frock, Paris, at the height of its season, seemed like a City of the Dead.

She had hired a fiacre for the afternoon and had driven first to the Bois; but the verdant alleys, the children at play, the carriages bowling past had added to her misery fourfold. So she went back to the boulevards; there, at least, in the moving crowd, at a street corner, under an archway, perhaps, she might catch sight of some man or woman whose very attitude or expression might indicate that like her they hid a breaking heart. Even this would be solace — an indefinite sympathy for the great weight that crushed her.

Her carriage was open, but she paid no attention to the admiring looks that followed her, to

the brightness on every side; she presented a numbness of understanding to all attractive objects on the course of this brilliant afternoon.

She began to say over to herself a familiar verse learnt at her nurse's knee. It came back to her with a kind of fascination at the moment; she forgot that she was speaking it aloud; other people beyond herself and Julian mattered vastly little just now.

> "O'er the yellow crocus on the lawn
> Floats a light white butterfly,
> Breeze waft it! See it's gone!
> Douchka, little soul, when didst thou die?"

She looked up to the great luminous blue sky spread above the roofs and chimneys and intricate wires; "Douchka, little soul, when didst thou die?" she cried out again, for it seemed to her that to all intents and purposes she was dead, that her soul had flown beyond the reach of every joy.

The fiacre still drove on. One by one, great tears coursed down her cheeks. The *bonne*, crossing the street with her bundle, saw them and pitied; two men at the half-way lamp nudged

each other and one exclaimed, "*V'là une p'tite femme qu'a perdu son homme,*" but she did not notice him, — her pain had escaped control.

At dusk she reached the hotel again. She felt chilly in her little room of dark hangings, and, though a summer night, she lit the fire and crouched beside it to think and think. It was queer that she should suddenly feel her soul dead — now of all times when she had made a great sacrifice. There had never been a question of a soul with Claud Sanders. She had been with him constantly, of course, but he had never even approached it — would have been bored if he had known she had one. But from the very first moment of their encounter her soul had been alive for Julian, and simply for his sake she had killed it. Oh, yes, she had killed it. Good people in books would tell her she had saved it, but that was untrue. She would go on living, probably for years and years; yet she knew that through all time she would sing, "Douchka, little soul, when didst thou die?" and she would remember when.

She wondered, if she had been courageous

enough to go straight to England, whether all would have been easier; yet for a few hours longer she must remain in the country where Julian was. What could he be doing now? — she had a sharp surmise he was playing, playing all the time; it was quite late when she pulled aside the curtains, the lamps in the street were already lit.

"*Madame est servie*," said the patient waiter for the second time, tired at last of the indifference to the dinner he had personally ordered and laid for her; but still she did not turn her head, gazing down on the yellow pavement, watching the flitting figures upon it, dark and small.

It was useless to expect her to eat; so she sent him away. She would go out again. People were murdered at night in Paris, the papers told her, but not in the main thoroughfares, which were safe as in the day. The gay, strolling throng would not remark her, nor yet those seated in the open cafés; but they would offer a passive companionship; if she cried out at her trouble they would at least hear and pity her madness; if she stayed alone she would be mad still and only with shadows.

As she went down the stairs a new temptation possessed her. To go back at once; to pretend that she had been away to fetch a summer hat — to design a newer frock — to laugh lightly — to invite Julian's intoxicating words — to encourage them — finally to yield herself to him easily, to become —

The word in her mind awoke an awful horror, a perfect medley of recollections. "Not that, not that," she moaned, "even if I die."

Greedy for the night air to cool her aching head, she pushed past three American girls standing in the hall with a roughness that caused them to turn and stare, till in the fresh empty streets she became more self-possessed.

The Rue de la Paix was strangely silent; it had passed through its day's conquests and hid the morrow's temptations under a veil of silence, of desertion. Douchka remembered her amusement there with Claud; how she had urged him to extravagance and piled dresses and hats at night upon each other as they were delivered, till their salon grew impossible, and he had insisted on dragging her, in spite of a violent cold, to the

Petit Paillard, to the Jardin de Paris, because he declared "to eat dinner in a lumber room was a d—d sight too much for him." What a different woman she was now, what a different man was Julian Carrender!

As she emerged upon the boulevards, the cafés, crowded with little tables, the people drinking from long glasses or from coffee-cups, smoking out into the still air and dawdling idly, all reminded her that in the baccarat rooms at Pelon he was probably playing for dear life. She conjured up his face; fretful from disappointment, he would grow reckless, he would lose continually, and curse her in his heart.

The further she went, the more in her mind Julian the gambler obliterated Julian the lover. Detached from herself, she began to see his career with renewed clearness. She began to suspect that she had checked his course for only a very little; and the more strongly for the check, would it draw him onward to his ruin. As she hurried — for she began to fear her solitude — she swept by a drinking house. It was full of players — low-class Parisians. Eager, turbulent, silent,

desperate, as the case might be, in the collection each face struck her shifting glance, and she trembled as she passed on.

She crossed the Place de la Concorde, between the automobiles and the rushing flight of bicyclists, and went down under the trees by the Seine. What she had done, what she was doing, all the while pursued her. She became quaintly aware that she had read her own history in many novels. "It's odd that life should be like books," she said; then her thought reached the usual suicide. But the river was dark and horrible, and she turned from the skulkers by the parapet. There was the vigour of sanity, after all, beneath her grieving. From that moment it asserted itself.

Twenty minutes later she had returned to the hotel. The quick walk had brought the colour to her cheeks, the brightness to her eyes. She never looked more beautiful than when she removed her hat and stared at her own reflection in the long pier-glass. Tumbling masses of brown hair above her white forehead, the strong marking of eyebrows, the curl of her lashes, the deep

shadows beneath her eyes — these were the distinctive marks of her most uncommonly attractive face.

And, as she looked, she came slowly, definitely, to a great resolution.

"He thought me beautiful," she repeated; "at any cost he shall believe me truthful. I will leave him no false illusions. 'I 'm a coward,' he confessed to his own cowardice once. Now, I 'll be brave, go back, and tell him."

. . . . . .

It was late when Douchka walked into Julian Carrender's sitting-room next day — it was nearly midnight, indeed, before the train had arrived.

The concierge had gone to bed. By chance she met no one, though for any astonishment displayed she had steeled herself with a greeting in reserve. She did not expect Julian to have returned from the Cercle — he would probably be there till the small hours of the morning. She would simply wait. But when she opened the door, he stood before her, right in the middle of the room, as if he had been pacing it.

He had not changed his clothes for the eve-

ning, but his face was changed — in so short a time — oddly, pitifully.

He saw her, and smiled, looking paler than ever then.

"Ah, Hope," he whispered, as if addressing a vision, "you 've come back." Then he bent forward by the table, and his shoulders heaved with sobs.

How different this from what she expeeted. His cynicism, his reproaches, even his surprise, all would have been natural, but not this despair.

She went to him, and laid her hand on his head. She acquired complete self-control for the moment.

"I ran away to shirk the truth — I 've come again to tell it."

He stood up then, fighting with his emotion.

"I 'm a fool," he said; "it did n't seem to be you exactly — only something that would prevent it."

"Prevent what?"

"The inevitable," he answered, putting his hand in his pocket.

"What do you mean?"

"That I dare n't live without you, that—"

She broke in hysterically—

"And I dare n't live with you—do you know what I am?"

He looked into her eyes steadily.

"A good woman," he said.

"A good woman!" she cried. "Did you think I went away because I was so respectable that your saying 'I care for you' shocked me? Did you think that? I went away because I am bad, miserably bad, and I feared you would find it out."

He did not reply, but there was more colour in his face now as he watched her.

"I went to Paris—I meant to go to England, I meant never to see you again—to let you think me foolish, prudish if you like, but at least to believe me pure. Then I was mad with sorrow, I wanted to tempt you; light love is so easy when one is beautiful, but beyond all things I know that with you it 's impossible. Now I 've come back because, though I mean to put all space of time and circumstance between us in another hour or two, I can't leave a lie behind.

I want you to know the truth; you shall carry me in your memory just as I am, not as another:" — she looked him full in the face — "I lived with a man for four years."

"At last," said Carrender, holding out his hands.

"For God's sake," she moaned, crouching at his feet, "not that — have pity for me."

She had misunderstood him — he was almost glad. He would be so tender in his explanation.

"See, I am a poor old gambler," he said quizzically, "with hardly a shilling in the world since yesterday. To-morrow if you had not come I think there would have been nothing — not even me. What are you going to do with what's left?"

"You mean it wasn't worth while to come back and add to your suffering. I know it's selfish of me, but I was obliged to do it."

"No that is not the point — what are you going to do for me?"

She turned her lovely tear-stained face to his perplexed.

"Marry me," he said, breaking the little

bottle which he took from his pocket, against the bars of the grate.

"Marry you?" she repeated slowly, "marry you? Did n't you understand what I said? I was not the man's wife — I —"

He laid his hand on her mouth.

"I know, dear," he said, "I knew it all the time."

"And you would marry me with my past?"

The incredulity of her tone could not conceal its joy.

"Let us bury your past," he said. "Take the big stone of my rake's progress to lay on it, and we will plant the grave with the roses of our love. God, what a woman you are!"

She needed no further words, she let him gather her into his arms, she covered his hands with her kisses.

"How good you are! Ah, what happiness!"

Then he told her when and how he had known — how after she had gone he knew how terribly he cared.

"I thought you my chance," she declared, explaining her line of conduct.

"You most certainly were mine."

"But isn't that false morality?" she argued presently, nestling closer.

"Ah, that's a thing to write a book about — in real life it's my poor worship. Do you believe me?"

"With all my heart."

Their lips met.

"Isn't it strange," she whispered, "that what one thinks must be the end is sometimes the beginning?"

"And some beginnings, pray heaven," he mused, "should have no end."

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